DECEMBER, 1916
VOL. XIII. No. 2

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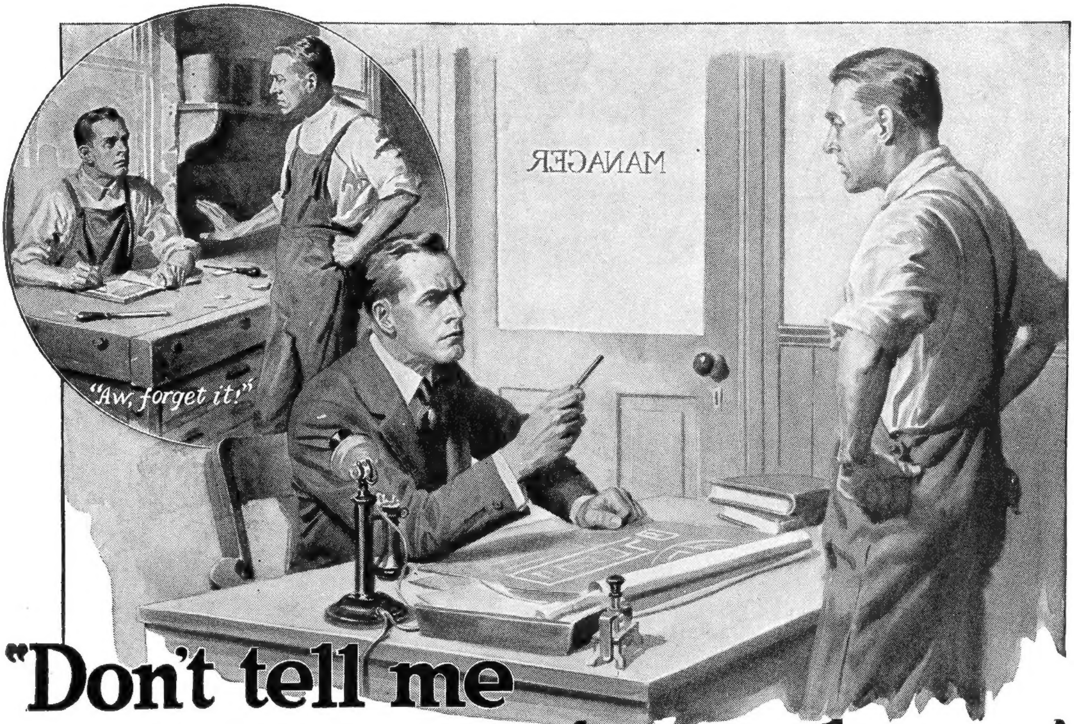

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FOR OTHER FEATURES TURN TO THE TRAIL AHEAD—LAST PAGE

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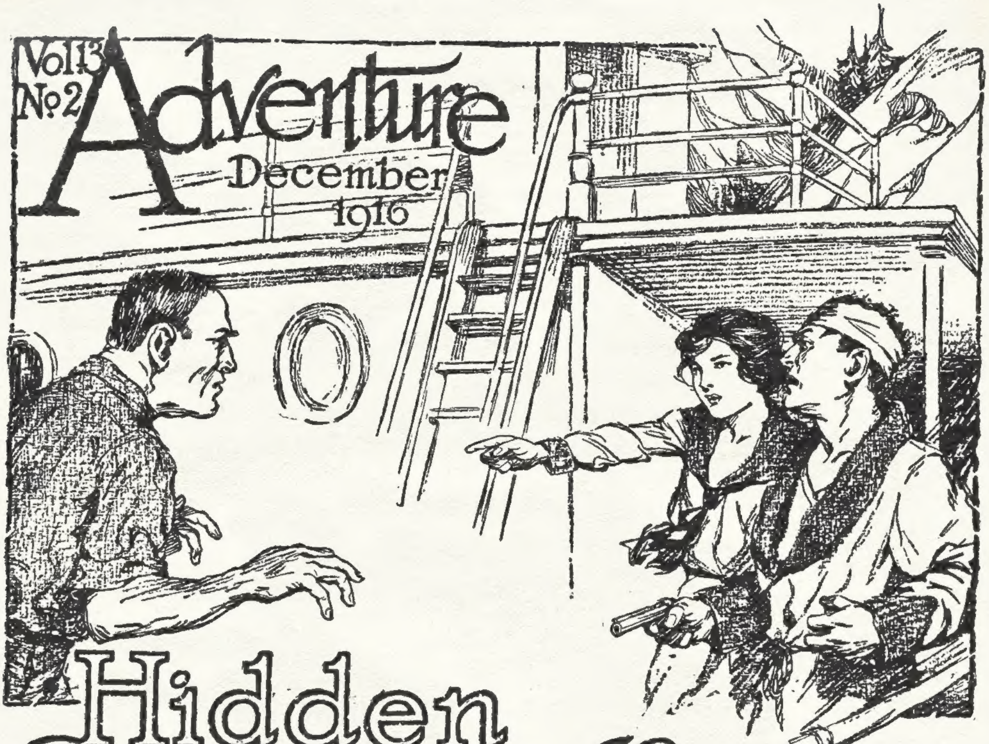

Hidden Country

A Complete Novel

by

Henry Oyen

Author of "The Snow Burner," "The Man Trail," "Gaston Olaf," etc.

GEORGE CHANLER'S offer of a position as literary secretary of his Arctic expedition came to me one fine May morning when I was sitting at my desk, glooming from an eighteenth-story height down upon the East River, and dreading to begin the day's work.

I had sat so for many mornings past. I was not happy; I was a failure. I was thirty years old, had a college education; my health was splendid and I was intelligent and ambitious. And I was precariously occupying a position as country correspondent in Hurst's Mail Order Emporium, salary $25 a week, with every reason to believe that I had achieved the limits of such success as my capabilities entitled me to.

"You ain't got no punch, Mr. Pitt; that's the matter vit' you," was my employer's verdict. "You're a fine feller, but—oof! How you haf got into the rut!"

I had. I was in so deeply that I had lost confidence and was losing hope. That was why I, Gardner Pitt, bookman by instinct and office-cog by vocation, was ripe for Chanler's sensational offer.

My friendship with Chanler, which had been a close one at school where I had done half his work for him, had of a necessity languished during the last few years. There is not much room for friendship between a poorly paid office man and an idle young millionaire. Yet it was apparent that George had not forgotten, for now he turned to me when he wanted some one to accompany him and write the history of his Arctic achievements.

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His offer came in the form of a long telegram from Seattle where he was outfitting his new yacht, *Wanderer*. Being what he was George gave me absolutely no useful information concerning the nature of his expedition. In what most concerned me, however, his message was sufficient: a light task, a Summer vacation, and at generous terms.

I looked out of the window at the wearying roofs of the city, and the yellow paper crumpled in my fingers as I clenched my fist. There was none of the adventurer in me. I was not in the optimistic frame of mind necessary to an explorer. But Chanler's offer was, at least, a chance to escape from New York. I bade Mr. Hurst good-by, and went out and sent a wire of acceptance.

EIGHT days later, shortly before noon, I stood on the curb outside the station in Seattle bargaining with a cabman to drive me to the dock where I had been directed to find a launch from the *Wanderer* awaiting me that morning. The particular cabman that I happened to hit upon was an honest man. He cheerfully admitted that he did not know the exact location of the dock mentioned in my directions, but he assured me that he knew in a general way in which section of the water-front it must be.

"And when we get down there I'll step in and ask at Billy Taylor's," he said, as if that settled the matter. "Billy'll know; he knows everything that's going along the water-front."

Billy Taylor's proved to be a tiny water-front saloon which my man entered with an alacrity that testified to a desire for something more than information concerning my dock. I waited in patience for many minutes with no sign of his return. I waited many more minutes in impatience with a like result.

In my broken-spirited condition I was not fit or inclined to reprimand a drinking cabman, but neither was I minded to sit idle while my man filled himself up. I stepped out of the cab and thrust open the swinging doors of the saloon.

I did not enter. My cabman was in the act of coming out, standing with one hand absently thrust out toward the doors, his attention arrested and held by something that was taking place in a small room at the rear of the saloon. The door of this room was half open. I saw a small, wiry man in seaman's clothes leaning over a round table, shaking his fist at a large man with light cropped hair who sat opposite him. A bottle of beer, knocked over, was gurgling out its contents on the floor. The large man was sitting up very stiff and straight, but smiling easily at the other's fury.

"No, you don't, Foxy; no you don't! You can't come any of your 'Captain' business on me, you Laughing Devil," screamed the little man. "Ah, ha! That stung, eh? Didn't think I knew what the Aleuts called you, eh, Foxy? 'Laughing Devil.' An' you talk like a captain to me, and ask me to go North with you! Here: what became of Slade and Harris, that let you into partnership with 'em after you'd lost your sealer in Omkutsk Strait? And what became of the gold strike they'd made? Eh? And you talk to me about a rich gold find *you've* got, and want me to help you take a rich sucker up North——"

"Still," said the big man suddenly. "Still, Madigan."

He had been smiling up till then, his huge, red face lighted up like a wrinkled red sun, but suddenly the light seemed to go out. The fat of his face seemed to become like cast bronze, with two pin-points of fire gleaming, balefully from under down-drawn lids. Several heavy lines which had been hidden in genial wrinkles now were apparent, and, though only the flat profile was visible to me, I saw, or rather I felt, that the man's face for the while was terrible.

To my amazement the infuriated seaman's abuse ceased as abruptly as if the power of speech had been taken from him. He remained in his threatening attitude, leaning across the table, his clenched fist thrust forward, his mouth open; but his eyes were held by the crop-haired man's and not a sound came from his lips.

"Down, Madigan," continued the big man. "It is my wish that you sit down."

A snarl came from the small man's lips. He seemed about to break out again, but suddenly he subsided and sat down. The big man nodded stiffly, as one might at child who has obeyed an unpleasant command, and the smaller man humbly closed the door.

My cabman came hurtling out through the swinging doors, nearly running me down in his hurry.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Did you see that, too? Whee-yew! That was a funny thing. That little fellow's Tad Madigan, a mate that's lost his papers, and the toughest man along the water-front; and he—he shut up like a schoolboy, didn't he?"

Saloon brawls, even when displaying amazing characters, do not interest me.

I reminded him that he had gone in to inquire about the location of my dock.

"Oh, that's a good joke on me," he laughed. "Your dock's right next door here, and you can see the *Wanderer* from Billy's back room."

A few minutes later I was standing in the midst of my baggage on this dock, looking out across the water to where lay anchored the white, clean-lined yacht, *Wanderer*.

It was a morning in early June, a day alive with bright, warm sun. A slight breeze with a mingling of sea, and pine, and the subtle scents of Spring in it, was coming up the Sound, and beneath its breath the water was rippling into wavelets, each with a touch of sun on its tiny crest.

An outdoor man might have thrilled with the scene, the sun, the fresh Spring-scent and all. But I was fresh from the asphalt and stone walls of New York, and I was broken-spirited, resigned to anything, elated over nothing, that fate might allot me. I merely looked over the water to the *Wanderer* to see if the promised launch was on its way.

"Sure enough, Mister, there comes a little gas-boat for you now," exclaimed my cabman, pointing with his whip to a small launch that was coming away from the yacht's stern. "You'll be all right; your friends have seen you. Well, good luck to you, friend, and lots of it."

"Thank you," I said, "and the same to you."

But I felt bitterly that there was little hope that his cheery wish would be realized for me.

As the launch drew nearer the dock I saw that a bareheaded and red-haired young man was in charge, and as it came quite near I saw that the young man's mouth was opening and closing prodigiously, and from snatches of sound that drifted toward me above the noise of the engine, I heard that he was singing joyously at the top of a strained and thoroughly unmusical voice.

He drove the launch straight at the dock in a fashion that seemed to threaten inevitable collision, but at the crucial moment the engine suddenly was reversed, the rudder swung around, and the little craft came sidling alongside against the timber on which I was standing; the young man tossed a rope around a pile, and with a sudden spring he was on the dock beside me.

"You're Mr. Gardner Pitt, if your baggage is marked right," he said, though I had not seen the swift glance he had shot at the initials on my bags.

He stood on his tip-toes, blinking in the sun, and filled his lungs with a great draft of air.

"Gee! It's some morning, ain't it, Mr. Pitt? A-a-ah-ah!" he continued with ineffable satisfaction. "It certainly is one grand thing to be alive."

I could not wholly subscribe to his sentiment at that time, but there was such an aura of wholesome good humor about the young man that I warmed toward him at once. He was probably twenty-three years old, short and boyish of build: his face was a mass of freckles; his eyes were very blue and merry; his nose very snubbed, his mouth large. He wore one of the most awful red ties that ever tortured the eyes of humanity, and the crime was aggravated by a pin containing a large yellow stone; but when he grinned it was apparent that he was one of those whom much is to be forgiven.

"I'm Freddy Pierce," he said. "Wireless operator and odd-job-man on the *Wanderer*. Say, Mr. Pitt, will you do me a favor?"

He looked at me with an expression of indescribable comicality on his sun-wrinkled face, and, willy-nilly, I found myself smiling.

"Thank you for them kind words," he laughed before I had opened my mouth. "Knew you'd do it; knew I had you sized up right. Let me roll a pill before we start back? Thanks."

With amazing swiftness he had produced tobacco and paper, rolled a cigaret, and sent a ring of smoke rolling upward through the clear air.

"Mr. Pitt," he said suddenly in a new tone, "do you know Captain Brack?"

"No," I said. "Who is Captain Brack?"

"Captain of the *Wanderer*," was the reply.

"I don't know him."

He threw away his cigaret and began easing my baggage down into the launch. He was serious for the moment.

"And—and say, Mr. Pitt, do you know a Jane—I mean, a lady named Miss Baldwin?"

I did not.

"Who is Miss Baldwin?"

Pierce suddenly snapped his teeth together, and the look that came upon his freckled countenance puzzled me for days to come.

"God knows—and the boss," he said enigmatically. "She—she's——"

He shook his head vigorously, then sprang into the launch. His serious moment had gone.

"Now get in while I'm holding 'er steady, Mr. Pitt. That's right." And now, *putt-putt,* said the engine, and bearing its precious freight the launch sped across the blue water to the noble yacht. "Ah, ha! And there's old 'Frozen Face,' the Boss's valet, waiting to welcome you on board."

II

I FOLLOWED the direction of Pierce's outstretched arm and on the deck of the *Wanderer* made out the stiff, precise figure of Chanler's man, Simmons, waiting in exactly the same pose with which he admitted one to his master's bachelor apartments in Central Park West. It was Simmons who welcomed me on board, and he did it ill, for it irked his serving-man's soul to countenance his master's friendship with persons of no wealth.

"Mr. Chanler is in his room, sir. You are to come there at once. This way, if you please, sir."

He led the way in his stiffest manner to a stateroom in the forward part of the yacht and knocked diffidently on the door.

"Go away! Please go away!" came the petulant response.

"Mr. Pitt, sir," said Simmons.

"Oh!" There was the sound of a desk being closed. "Show him in. Hello, Gardy! Glad to see you! I'm fairly dying for somebody to talk to!"

Chanler was sprawled gracefully over a chair before a writing-desk built into the forward wall of the stateroom. He was wearing a mauve dressing-gown of padded silk and smoking one of his phenomenally long cigarets in a phenomenally long amber holder. It had been long since I had seen him and he had changed deplorably; but so rapid and eager was his greeting that I had no time to note just where the change had come.

"You're a good fellow to come, Gardy," said he with a genuine note of gratitude in his tones. "I knew you'd help me, though. Simmons—bring a couple of green ones, please."

"Not for me," I hastened to interpose. "You know I never touch anything before dinner."

"That's so; I forgot. You've got yourself disciplined. Well, bring one green one, Simmons. I don't usually do this sort of thing so early, either," he continued as Simmons vanished, "but I sat up late with Captain Brack last night, and I'm a little off. Wonderful chap, the captain; head on him like a piece of steel. Well, Gardy, what do you think of the trip?"

"When you have told me something about it I may have an opinion," I replied. "You know all the knowledge of it that I have was what came in your message."

"That's so. Well, what did you think when you got the wire? You must have thought something; you think about everything. What did you think when you heard that I was planning a stunt like this—something useful, you know? Eh?"

"Well, it was something of a shock," I admitted.

Chanler smiled. But it was not the likable, indolent, boyish smile of old which admitted:

"Quite so. Came as a shock to hear that I was planning to be something besides a loafer spending the money my governor made. I knew it would. You never expected anything like this of me, Gardy?"

"No, I can't say that I did."

"Neither did I. Never dreamed of it until three months ago, and then—then I discovered that I had to do—come in, Simmons," he interrupted himself as the valet knocked.

While he was swallowing his little drink of absinth I studied him more closely.

There had always been something of the young Greek god about George Chanler, an indolent, likable, self-satisfied young god with a long, elegant body and a small curl-wrapped head. Now I saw how he had changed. The fine body and head had grown flabby from too much self-indulgence and too little use. There was a new look about the lazy eyes which hinted at a worry, the sort of worry which troubles a man awake or sleeping. Something had happened to George Chanler, something that had shaken him out of the armor of indolent self-sufficiency which Chanler money had grown around him. The boyish lines about his mouth were gone. It was not a likable face now; it was cynical, almost brutal.

"That's all, Simmons," he said, allowing Simmons to take the empty glass from his hand. "What was I saying, Gardy, when I stopped?"

"That you discovered that you had to do——"

"Oh, yes." He paused a while. "Didn't you wonder why I was doing this sort of thing when you got my wire, Gardy?"

"Naturally, I did."

"And you haven't got any idea, or that sort of thing, about why I'm doing it?"

"You say that your purpose is to explore——"

"I mean, what started me on the trip?"

I shook my head.

"Haven't you even got a good guess?"

"Well, it might be a bet, doctor's orders, or just an ordinary whim."

He shook his head, looking pensively out of the window, or at least, as near pensively as he could.

"No," he said. "Nothing so easy as that. I'm doing it because of a——"

He caught himself sharply and looked at me.

"What did you think I was going to finish with, Gardy?"

"I had three guesses," I replied. "I wouldn't guess again."

"I'm doing it," he resumed slowly, "I'm doing it because—I had to do something useful, and this is the sort of thing I like to do."

I smiled a little.

"What's that for, Gardy?" he asked.

"I didn't know you ever recognized the words 'had to' as applicable to yourself."

"By jove! And I didn't, Gardy; I never did in the world—until three months ago. But then something happened."

He looked out of the window for a long time.

"No, I'm not going to tell you, Gardy. It's none of your business. No offense, you know."

"Of course not. I didn't ask."

"You'll know without asking, in time. Well, I've told you I found I had to do something—something useful. That was quite a jolt, you know. Never fancied I'd ever *have* to do anything, and as for doing anything useful—rot, my boy, for me, you know. But I found I had to, and so when I met Brack— By the way, Brack's the chap who's responsible for my 'doing something' in this way. Wonderful fellow. Met him in San Francisco. Don't mind admitting to you, old man, that I was traveling pretty fast.

"Went to San Francisco with an idea of going to China, or around the world, or something like that, to forget. Met him in the Palace barroom. Saved me. He'd just come back from the North, where he'd lost his sealing vessel. He said: 'Why don't you buy the *Wanderer* and do some exploring?' 'What's the *Wanderer*,' says I. 'Strongest gasoline yacht in the world,' he says. I began to pick up; life held interest, you know. Went to see the *Wanderer*. Belonged to old Harrison, the steel man, who'd done a world tour in her and wanted to sell. 'Where's a good place to explore if I do buy her?' says I, and Brack told me about Petroff Sound. Ever hear of it before this, Gardy?"

"I've seen the name some place, nothing more."

"I wired old Doc Harper about it after Brack had talked to me about the place. Asked if it would be a good stunt to go up there; credit to the old school to have a 'grad' get the bones, you know."

"Bones?" I exclaimed.

"Bones," said Chanler. "Read that," and he handed me a long letter signed by the venerable president of our school.

The Petroff Sound territory unquestionably is a district which science demands be explored. Mikal Petroff, the Russian who in 1889 brought out the tibea of a mammoth, (elephas primigenius) and several bone fragments which certainly had belonged to an animal of characteristics similar to the extinct elephant species, was an illiterate fur-trader and therefore his report of a field of similar bones frozen in the never-thawing ice of the Sound must not be accepted as positive information.

In 1892, however, Sturlasson, the Norwegian captain, who reached the Sound after the wreck of his sealing vessel, made entries in his diary before dying which substantiate Petroff's story. As the location of the Sound, as recorded by Sturlasson, is three minutes west of the location as given by your informant, it is certain that the latter knows of Petroff Sound. No nobler use could be found for

> your activity and wealth than the expedition you are considering. Before expressing myself further, I will give such data as is obtainable from sources at my command.

Dr. Harper's data on Petroff Sound was deadly dry scientific matter which explained that while the possible discovery of frozen mammoth bones would be of great interest to the scientific world, the study of the terrain and of conditions surrounding these bones would be of infinitely greater value.

"Then it's purely a scientific affair," I said. "To be of any value it must be scientific."

"Positively, dear boy, positively. I'll give you a lot of stuff to read up on after luncheon. Old Harper took trouble to wire me to be sure to have an authentic, coherent report made of the expedition's findings. Well, that's where you came in. I haven't got brains, but you have, Gardy, and you're going to help me out. We sail tonight, by the way, and we won't be back until cold weather, so ye who have tears prepare to shed them between now and midnight."

"But who is the scientist of the expedition?"

"Brack. He's a geologist, mineralogist, oceanographer, and general shark on all that sort of stuff. Expert explorer. Quit exploring and went sealing. Lost his schooner, and had come down and was living at the Palace, waiting for capital to start again. Wonderful mind. He's ashore at present framing up a little sport to help us pass the afternoon. We'll get ready for luncheon now, Gardy. He'll be here then and you'll meet him. Sure you won't have a tot of grog before eating, Gardy?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, I will, just a little. Simmons will show you to your stateroom. Hope you're witty and full of scandal, Gardy, 'cause I'm awf'ly, awf'ly bored these days and I've got to be amused."

Simmons, summoned by the bell, ushered me into the stateroom next to Chanler's. The two rooms were nearly identical in size and furnishings, and I wondered idly why Chanler, as owner, did not occupy the owner's suite forward. Later I had a glimpse into the owner's suite through a half-open door, and was more puzzled: the suite was obviously furnished for feminine occupation.

Captain Brack had not arrived when we entered the dining-saloon of the *Wanderer* for luncheon. There were present Mr. Riordan, Chief Engineer, Dr. Olson, physician to the expedition, and the second officer, Mr. Wilson. Riordan was a pale, sour-looking Irishman, tall, loosely built, heavy-jawed, and with a bitter down-curve to the corners of his large, loose mouth. Once I saw him shoot a sly glance at George Chanler's long, thin hands, and the look was not what a dutiful employee should have bestowed upon so generous an employer.

Opposite Riordan, and beside me, sat Mr. Wilson, second in command, who had come with the *Wanderer* from her former owner. He was a strongly built, silent, brown-faced man, of about thirty-five who always appeared as if he had just been shaven, as if his clothes had just been brushed, and whose shoes always seemed to be polished to the same degree. His face was square and lean, and against the weather-beaten neck his immaculate collar gleamed with startling whiteness. He spoke seldom except when spoken to and then modestly and to the point. "Yes sir" and, "No sir," were the words most frequently on his lips.

Dr. Olson was a small, unobtrusive man with a light Vandyke beard, to whom no one paid any attention and who spoke even less than Mr. Wilson.

The introductions were barely over when a quick light step fell on the deck outside and Chanler, languidly waving his hand at the door behind me, said—

"Mr. Pitt, meet Captain Brack."

I rose and turned with interest. My interest suddenly gave way to consternation. A chill went flashing along my spine. I stood like a dumb man. Captain Brack was the large man whom I had heard called "Laughing Devil" in Billy Taylor's saloon a short time before.

III

THE Captain was bowing to me with the easy impressiveness of the man to whom ceremonial is no novelty. He was smiling. There was in his smile the good humor of an adult toward a half-grown child. He stood up very straight and precise, his shoulders at exact right angles to his thick neck, his out-thrust chest almost pompous in its roundness.

He was, I judged, exactly my own height, which was five feet nine, but so thick was he in every portion of his anatomy that the physical impression which he made was overpowering. His head and face were large and, thanks to a closely cropped pompadour, gave, in spite of considerable fat, the impression of being square. The eyes were out of place in his head. Hidden under half-closed, fat lids they were mere specks in size, yet when I had once looked into them I stared in fascination.

The head, and the fat, square face with its brutalized lines were frankly, flauntingly animal. The eyes betrayed a great mind. In that gross, brutal countenance the gleam of such an intellect seemed a shocking accident, one of those perversions of Nature's plans which result in the production of abnormalities. What was this man? Was he the common creature of his thick jowls? or was he the developed man to whom belonged those eyes? Was that animal countenance but a mask? Or did the low instincts, which its lines betrayed, dominate, while the mind struggled in vain beneath such a handicap?

Those tiny eyes held mine and studied me cruelly. Before them I felt stripped to the marrow of my soul. My dreams, my weaknesses, my failures seemed to stand out like print for Brack to read. His superior smile indicated that he had read, that he had appraised me for a weakling; and for the life of me I could not control the resentment that leaped within me.

I looked him as steadily in the eyes as I could. He saw the resentment that lay there; for an instant there flickered a new look in his eyes; then they were bland and smiling again. But that instant was enough for each of us to know that one could never be aught but the other's enemy.

"I am glad to see you on board, Mr. Pitt, as they say in the navy," said Captain Brack with deepest courtesy.

"I am glad to be on board, Captain Brack," I replied steadfastly.

"It is a pleasure to have for shipmate a literary man like Mr. Pitt."

"It is a pleasure to contemplate a voyage in such company as Captain Brack's."

"We shall strive to make the voyage as interesting as possible, for you, Mr. Pitt," said he.

"I am sure of that," said I, "and I will do my poor best to reciprocate."

"In a rough seaman's way I have studied a little—enough to be interested in books. So we have, in a way, a bond of interest to begin with."

"Mr. Chanler has told me something of your achievements, Captain Brack; I am sure you belittle them."

It was very ridiculous. Brack had put me on my mettle; so there we stood and slavered each other with fine speeches, each knowing well that the other meant not a word of the esteem that he uttered. Yet as the luncheon progressed I was inclined to agree with George: Brack was a wonderful chap. The man's mind seemed to be a great, well-ordered storehouse of facts and impressions which he had collected in his travels. Sitting back in his chair he dominated the company, led the talk whither he willed, and having said his say, beamed contentedly. And before the meal was over I had a distinct impression that Brack not Chanler, was master on the yacht.

Chanler, Brack, Riordan and Dr. Olson drank steadily throughout the luncheon. Mr. Wilson and myself drank not at all. As the luncheon neared its end, Chanler, his eyes steady but his under lip hanging drunkenly, broke out:

"Well, how about it, cappy? Did you land your two bad men?"

"Yes," said Brack. "After luncheon I can promise you a little sport."

Chanler laughed a dreary, half-drunken laugh.

"Gardy, we've fixed up a little sport. Awf'lly dull lying here. Have to pass the time some way."

"If I may make the suggestion," said Brack courteously, "perhaps Mr. Pitt has duties, or wishes which will prevent him from viewing our little sport."

"Not 'tall, not 'tall," said Chanler.

"Perhaps it would be well for Mr. Pitt to wait a few days until—shall we say until he has become more accustomed to our ways—before treating himself to a sight of our little amusements?"

"Why so?" I demanded.

"Oh, it is merely a suggestion. Our sport is rather primitive—the bare, crawling stuff of life without the perfumery, wrappings, or other fanciful hypocrisies of civilization. Mr. Pitt, does not look like a man who would admit that life so exists, and therefore must refuse to behold it."

Chanler turned from Brack to me, his teeth showing in a pleased smile.

"Ha! Hot shot for you, that, Gardy. What say, old peg; where's your come-back—repartee, and all that?"

As I hesitated for a reply, he tapped the table impatiently.

"Come, come, Gardy! A little brilliance, please. We don't let him touch us and get away without a counter, do we? Ha! At 'im, boy; at 'im!"

"As Mr. Brack——"

"Ha! Mister Brack! Well, struck, Gardy; go on."

"As Captain Brack has failed to inform me what it is we are about to see I, of course, can not be expected to express any opinion on it," I said. "But as concerns 'the bare, crawling stuff of life,' I will reply that Life no longer crawls, nor is it bare."

Chanler turned his eyes upon Brack.

"Your shot, cappy. What say to that?"

Brack bowed.

"I will reply by asking Mr. Pitt why he thinks life no longer is bare and crawling?"

"Because," said I, "the mind of man has decreed that it should not be so. Because mas has erected a civilization in order to insure that life shall not be bare and crawling."

"Civilization is not the point," said Brack. "We spoke of Life. We, as we stand here, clothed, barbered, wearing the products of machinery to hide our bodies, we are Civilization. We, as we enter the bathtub in the morning, are Life—forked radishes." He rolled his great head far back and looked down his thick cheeks at me appraisingly. "Some are small radishes; others are large."

"Ha! Rather raw on you with that last one, Gardy. Small and large ones. You are small, you know, Gardy, compared to me or the captain."

"Size can scarcely matter to radishes," I said.

"Cappy, cappy! He scored on you there. What say to that?"

"I will say—" began Captain Brack, but Chanler had tired of his sport as suddenly as he had become interested.

"Rot, rot!" he said, tapping on the table. "You were going to amuse us with your new finds. Let's have it."

"Very well," said the captain, arising. "It will be ready in fifteen minutes."

I was glad of that respite of fifteen minutes. It gave me an opportunity to slip into my stateroom and pull myself together. Brack had shaken and stirred me as I had not thought possible. His terrific personality had exerted upon me the effects of a powerful stimulant. Once or twice in my life I had taken whisky in sufficient quantity to cause me to experience thoughts, emotions, elations which did not properly belong in the normal, self-controlled Me. Now I experienced something of the same sensation. My mind was buzzing with a hundred swift impressions and conjectures upon Brack.

The picture I had beheld and the words I had heard through the swinging doors of Billy Taylor's repeated themselves to me, and I felt the same sensation of a chill that I had felt upon recognizing in Brack the big man from the saloon. The words which the small man had uttered were fraught with sinister suggestion. From them it was apparent that he recognized in the captain a man who was known as "Laughing Devil," whose reputation, if the seaman's words might be taken for truth, was not of the sort that one would care to have in the captain of the yacht on which one was sailing into far seas. Also it was apparent from the man's words that Brack had made some sort of proposition: "a rich sucker," had been mentioned.

My course was plain before me: to go to Chanler's state-room, tell him what I had seen and heard, and demand that he investigate Brack's actions or permit me to resign my position. I had no definite idea of what the words between Brack and Madigan might portend, but there was no doubt that they established faithfully the captain's character. In my depressed condition I shuddered at the idea of putting to sea with such a man.

But—Captain Brack had smiled. That smile stopped me. The appalling brutality of the captain's mental processes had started within me a slow, steady flame. It was ghastly; the man's expression had shown that he considered me a thing to play with! The brute had looked in my eyes, had stripped me to the marrow, read me for a weakling, and smiled, so that I might know that he had seen all! And the worst of it was that he was doing it with a mind which weighed me calmly, without prejudice, with scientific calmness.

It was not fair, it was not human. The man should at least have refrained from forcing me to see how weak he considered me. And was I so weak? Was I the worm he thought me to be?

"No!" I cried aloud; and I was pacing the floor when Simmons knocked on my door.

IV

UP ON the roomy bridge of the yacht I found Chanler and Brack seated on deck stools drawn close to the rail, looking down upon the immaculate fore-deck. As I followed their example I saw near the port side two seamen holding a squat, heavy negro by a rope passed under his arms. The man was trembling and moaning.

"He's a bad man and near the snakes from gin," laughed Chanler. "Over there's Garvin, who fought Sharkey a couple of times."

The pugilist, a large, young man, flashily dressed, though miserably bedraggled, was leaning against the starboard rail, scowling darkly at the negro.

"Give you gin?" he was saying to the negro. "Give you gin? What yah talkin' about, Smoke? Give you, gin? Nix. I'm the guy who gets the gin. I'm Bill Garvin. That's why I get the gin and you get hell."

As the negro broke out into his terrible moaning, the pugilist's debauched nerves seemed to snap.

"Stop him! —— you! You lousy ——! Stop him! If you don't I'll kick his head off—I'll kick your black head off, Smoke; I'll kick your head off."

His mad wandering eyes caught sight of Brack on the bridge.

"How 'bout that, pal? Won't I kick his —— black head off. I'm Bill Garvin." He took a step forward and stood staring at Brack. "Say, you're the guy who was going to gimme booze, ain't you? Billy wouldn't let me run my face any more; you said, 'Come on, I'll take you where there's lots of it.' Well, how 'bout it, there? Hah! How 'bout it?"

Brack smiled down upon him. And his smile was the same as he had bestowed upon me; Garvin, too, was a thing to play with.

"Well, I don't know, Garvin," he replied. "I promised Black Sam the same thing. I think I shall give him drink before you. He said he'd kill you if you got a drink before him."

The pugilist stared stupidly while the significance of these words seeped into his sodden brain. A weird smile distorted one side of his face.

"He—" pointing to the negro—"said he'd do that to me?" Thumping his chest he roared: "Kill me! Bill Garvin? Sa-a-ay!"

He lurched over to where the negro stood. At first he seemed undecided what to do. Then he suddenly reached forward and caught the black's head in chancery, and bent furiously over it. There came a horrible growl from Garvin's throat, a piercing scream from the negro. Garvin had bitten deeply into the black's ear.

I started back from the rail, every sense revolting, and found Brack studying me, the smile with which he favored me fixed on his lips.

"So? The stomach is not strong enough, Mr. Pitt? You feel a faintness. Yes; I have even seen delicate ladies lose consciousness under similar circumstances."

"I do not lose consciousness," I replied, drawing a chair up to the railing and seating myself, "but at the same time I fail to see what amusement a civilized man can find in this spectacle."

"So? You can not see that, Mr. Pitt? If it would not be rude I would say that it is the truly civilized man, so highly civilized that he is not troubled by sentimentality or humanitarian motives, who can appreciate spectacles of this nature. The scientific type of mind is the ultimate product of civilization, is it not, Mr. Pitt? Well, it is only the scientist who can view properly the bare, crawling thing called Life."

"Rot, rot, rot!" interrupted Chanler, each word punctuated with a rap of his cane on the deck. "Put on your show, Brack. Hope that wasn't all you dragged me out here for?"

"That was entirely impromptu. I had no idea Mr. Garvin was so versatile. The show follows. Dr. Olson."

The little doctor appeared on the deck bearing a large bottle of whisky and a tumbler. First he filled the glass full and poured it down the negro's gaping mouth, then served Garvin in the same way. The negro grew calmer as the stimulant took hold. He examined the rope with which he was imprisoned and seemed to realize his situation.

"Say, boss, ah ain't done nuffin. What yah got me in heah foh?" he said in a rational tone of voice. "Lemme out, kain't yah? Ah'm awri'."

"Let him go," said Brack.

The two seamen let go the rope and the black fell forward. Garvin waved his hands at the sea.

"That's where you'll go, Smoke—overboard in pieces."

The negro was crouched against the wheel-house, rubbing his hands on his thighs, his small red eyes feasting on the pugilist, a stream of profanity flowing in low tones from his lips.

"Dah he be, Sam, dah he be," he whispered. "Dah deh white —— what bit you eah. Got you eah, got you eah! What yah goin' do 'bout it, what yah goin' do, what you goin' do?" His words came swifter and swifter; he crouched lower, his hands moved more rapidly. "Goin' kill 'im, goin' kill 'im, kill 'im—kill 'im. Ow!"

With such a howl as belonged in no human throat, he launched himself, a ball of black bounding across the deck, straight at Garvin. He came head down, like a bull charging, and, Garvin side-stepping, he plunged head and shoulders between two rods of the port railing, where he stuck.

Chanler laughed drily.

"Not so bad, cappy," he drawled. "It promises to be amusing, really."

Garvin fell upon the negro before the latter had freed himself. He caught one of the black's hands, drew it upward, and bent the arm over the rail till it threatened to snap or tear out the muscles at the shoulders.

"No," said Brack in the same tone he had used on Madigan in Taylor's saloon. "No more of that, Garvin."

The pugilist, his brutality warming with the work in hand, looked up, a leer of contempt on his face.

"You will let go of his arm, Garvin," said Brack.

The fighter obeyed, releasing his hold reluctantly, but he obeyed nevertheless. The black thrust himself free of the rail and faced his tormentor.

"Get hold ob 'im, Sammy; get hold ob 'im!" he whispered loudly, and moved toward Garvin with slow shuffling steps.

Garvin waited until the instant when the negro had planned the final spring, then his fist flashed up from below his knees and the black fell like a thrown sack of grain against the wheel-house.

"By Jove!" said Chanler. "Your man Garvin is really promising, Brack. Ha! The nigger's no cripple, either."

Black Sam had come to his feet with a spring. Again began his slow, determined advance upon Garvin, again Garvin's fist flew out and the negro dropped with a thud.

This happened four times, and the negro was red from the neck up. The fifth time his small round head dropped suddenly as Garvin launched another terrific blow. The fist and black poll met with a sharp crack. The negro was flung back on his haunches, but Garvin grasped his right hand and swore futilely. Garvin looked up at the bridge, holding forth his hand.

"Hey! Call 'im off; take a look at me meathook!" he shouted.

"You still have your feet," said Brack.

The fight raged again. Garvin was on his back now, kicking furiously. At last a kick favored him; he knocked the negro down. But this was his undoing, for Black Sam in falling landed full length upon Garvin, and in an instant his short, thick fingers had closed upon the white man's throat.

After awhile Brack gave a signal to Mr. Riordan, the chief engineer, who was standing below. Without any hurry or excitement, Riordan walked over and kicked the negro in the temple. The stunned black released his hold. With another kick Riordan lifted him clear off Garvin.

Brack turned toward Chanler.

"Well, are they worth keeping?"

"Oh, I s'pose so," said Chanler, yawning as he rose. "Rather amusing. Suit yourself, cappy."

"Come 'long, Gardy," said Chanler, leading the way off the bridge. He chuckled a little pointing back toward the combatants. "Conceited scum, those. Fighting men. Bad men. Be interesting to see Brack make 'em behave."

"Chanler," I said, "do you mean to tell me that you found any pleasure watching that bestial fight?"

"Pleasure? Pleasure, Gardy? Ha! It's a long time since I've met the lady, m'boy.

But a chap's got to do what he can to keep from being bored. They did it—a little. I'm bored now. Do something, Gardy, say something. Hang it, man; can't you do as much for me as those two brutes? Simmons! Some other togs, please. These I've got on make me dopy."

He strode down into the cabin, forgetting me absolutely in this new evanescent whim.

V

I STEPPED to the port rail and bared my head to the young Spring breeze. I was disgusted. The sense of something uncleanly seemed to cling to me from the spectacle on the fore-deck and I was grateful for the antiseptic feel of the wind with its pure odors.

"Pretty raw, wasn't it, Mr. Pitt?"

I looked up and saw Pierce, the young wireless operator, standing beside me.

"Yep. I feel that way about it, too," he went on. "Not that I've got anything against seeing a good battle any time, 'cause I was raised back o' the Yards in Chicago, and no more need be said. But that—that go forward, that was too raw. Garvin, he's a sure 'nough pug—he stayed ten rounds with Sharkey once when Tom was starting, but the poor stew was about ready to have the "willies"; and the poor dinge was seeing snakes. Naw, it was too raw. Ear-eating and that kind of stuff. They hadn't ought to have matched 'em. They couldn't put up half a battle, the shape they was."

"I didn't object to it on those grounds," I said, and as I looked at his merry, freckled face I was forced to smile. "Though I can appreciate your artistic disapproval. It disgusted me because it was so useless and brutal."

"That's what I said," he responded promptly. "It was useless, because it wasn't half a go, and brutal because they wasn't in shape to stand the punishment."

"We are slightly apart in our view-points, I am afraid, Mr. Pierce."

"But you're with me that it was bum match-making?"

I nodded.

"And that a right guy—you know what I mean: a guy who was right all the way through—couldn't get any fun out of watching it?"

I nodded again. Pierce placed both hands on the railing, running his fingers up and down as if on a keyboard, whistling softly through his teeth.

"Did you notice how the boss ate it up?" he said abruptly.

"Mr. Chanler?"

"Yep. He eyed it like—like it was a pretty little thing to him."

I said nothing. Pierce resumed his whistling and finger-practise on the rail. Suddenly he turned and faced me squarely, his countenance uncomfortably serious, as it had been on the dock that morning.

"I suppose you're thinking what an awful dub I am to be making a crack about the boss to one of his friends, ain't you, Mr. Pitt?"

"Well, to be frank," I replied, "I have been wondering at your doing so. How do you know that I won't go straight to Mr. Chanler with your words? I won't do it, of course, but I would prefer that you do not discuss Mr. Chanler with me. One doesn't do such things, you know."

"No," he said, "I didn't know; I was raised back o' the Yards. But if you say, 'nix on it,' nix it is. What—what do you think of the boat, Mr. Pitt? We can discuss that, can't we?"

"Freely," I laughed. "From what I've seen the *Wanderer* is a remarkable yacht."

"And you haven't seen anything but the gingerbread work. I'm off watch. Come on; let's walk around and pipe her off. It'll take the taste of that bum battle out of your mouth."

I accepted willingly, and for an hour Pierce piloted me about the yacht.

The *Wanderer* is a craft of wonders. I have Pierce's word that the yacht is 152 feet long on the water line with her present load, and that the load is the maximum which we could carry with safety. Her size below the cabin deck is amazing. In her engine room are some of the largest gasoline engines ever placed in a yacht, if Pierce's information is correct. There are two great gleaming batteries of them, each battery capable of driving us at a speed of ten knots an hour, the two combined able to hurry us along at fourteen knots, if necessary. Besides this we have a small auxiliary engine and propeller, a novelty installed by the former owner, Harrison. We could smash both of our major engines and the auxiliary still would move us.

Built into the bows are the reserve

gasoline tanks. There is enough fuel in them, says Pierce, to drive the *Wanderer* twice around the world. Aft of these vast tanks are the storerooms. They are locked. Captain Brack has the key, but Freddy assures me that enough provisions have been loaded into them to keep our company of fifteen men well fed for two years.

"Which certainly is playing safe, seeing as we're not supposed to get frozen in," said he, as we completed our tour below decks. "Now, come on and I'll show you my private office."

He led the way up a ladder to the little wireless house on the aft of the main cabin. This was Pierce's room. His bunk was beside the table on which were his instruments, and he had covered the walls—"decorated," he called it—with newspaper cuts of celebrated baseball players, pugilists, motor-racers, and women of the musical comedy stage. Lajoie's picture was next to Terry McGovern's, and Chevrolet's beside Miss Anna Held's. I smiled as I seated myself.

"Something of a connoisseur, I see, Pierce."

"Whatever that means," he responded.

He had become serious again. He took a cigaret paper from his pocket, absently tore it to pieces and sat glancing out over the waters of the Sound.

"So you don't know a Jane—a girl named Miss Beatrice Baldwin, Mr. Pitt?" he said, as if he had been thinking of saying it for a long time.

"You asked me that this morning," said I. "Why do you think I might know her?"

"You'n' the Boss is close friends, ain't you?"

"I wouldn't say 'close friends'."

"I know. But you know him back East, and train with him, and know the bunch he trains with back there, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, to a certain extent."

"That's why I thought you might have heard of this Jane—Miss Baldwin, I mean."

"I assure you, Pierce," I said, smiling, "that one would have to possess a much larger circle of acquaintances than I have to know all the young ladies of Mr. Chanler's acquaintance."

He looked up.

"Is he that kind of a guy?" he asked.

"What kind do you mean?"

"A charmer, a Jane-chaser, lady-killer?"

The perfect naiveté with which he uttered this outrageous slang brought me to hearty laughter, the first of long time.

"Mr. Chanler," I said, suppressing my amusement, "is a much sought after man."

"Sure; he's got the dough. But does he chase 'em back? Eh? Is he— Here, I'll put it up to you straight: would you let your own sister go walking with him alone in the park after dark?"

I rose. But for the life of me I could not hold offense in the face of his honest, worried expression.

"Pierce," I said, "that is another thing one does not do—ask such questions. And I have told you that you are not to discuss Mr. Chanler with me."

"Aw, the devil!" he blurted. "Why can't you be human? You're a reg'lar fellow; I can see it in the back of your eyes. I'm a reg'lar fellow. Why can't we get together?"

"Not on a discussion of Mr. Chanler behind his back," I chuckled. "It isn't done."

Pierce doubled himself up on the stool which he was sitting on and grasped his thin ankles in his hands.

"All right, then," he said moodily. "But I want to tell you I've been handling messages between the boss and a Miss Beatrice Baldwin; and he sent her one this morning and got a reply; and—I wished I'd never learned wireless, that's all."

"Mr. Chanler is a gentleman," I said severely.

"A gentleman?" said Pierce gloomily. "I suppose that makes it all right, then, eh? But nevertheless and notwithstanding, I wish I hadn't learned wireless, just the same. And you don't even ask me what the message was about," he continued as I remained silent. "That's the difference: I'd have asked first crack; you're a gent. You don't ask at all."

"Naturally not," I replied. "That's another thing one doesn't do. I won't even permit you to tell me what it was."

"You won't?"

"Decidedly not."

"Not even if I tell you——"

"No."

"All right then," he said with a comical air of resignation and relief. "I've done me jooty. It's something out of my class; I wanted to pass it up to somebody with a better nut than I've got; but if I can't—all right. I suppose after you 'n' me 've known each other five or six years we'll be well enough acquainted to talk together like a couple o' human beings, eh? I know I hadn't ought to be talking to you like this, Mr. Pitt; you're a New York highbrow and I'm from back o' the Yards; but I'll make you a nice little bet right now, that before this trip is over—if you're the guy I think you are, Brains — you 'n' me'll tear off more'n one little confab behind the boss's back, and you'll be darn glad to do it."

I rose to go.

"I can imagine no reason why we should," I said. "This is a scientific expedition; you are the wireless operator, and I am Mr. Chanler's literary secretary. Under the circumstances, why should you be willing to bet?"

"Under those circumstances, I wouldn't be willing to bet," he retorted. "But—scientific expedition!" he exploded in disgust. "Scientific ——!"

VI

I RETIRED precipitately to my stateroom, not wishing to hear more. By this time I had seen enough to realize that the hard-drinking George Chanler of the present was not the same man whom I had been friendly with back East. That Chanler never would have endured the brutal sport with Garvin and the negro. He would not have fallen under the spell of a man like Brack; he would not have sent wireless messages to a girl which would make an honest operator like Pierce wish he had never learned his trade. I remembered the owner's suite, unoccupied and furnished for a woman's comfort.

"Scientific ——!" Pierce had said.

But it was too late for me to consider quitting now. Captain Brack and his taunting smile had attended to that. If I left now the contempt in his eyes would be justified: I would be the weakling which his look announced me to be. He would smile that smile as I went over the side; would continue to smile it whenever my name was mentioned.

I was disgusted with Chanler. But in my heart I was afraid of Brack, and, paradoxically, for this reason I was afraid to quit.

"Scientific —— !" What did Pierce mean? Whatever it was I judged it to concern only Chanler, therefore it did not greatly concern me. But Brack—so greatly did his smile distress me that I actually looked forward to meeting him again with something akin to relish.

That evening, near the end of the dinner, Dr. Olson happened to speak of the totem gods of the Northern Pacific tribes.

"Yes," said Brack, "they whittle their gods out of wood with knives; white men use their minds to whittle theirs. Men are greater than gods. What would gods amount to if they didn't have men to worship them? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Can you imagine anything more impotent than an unworshiped god? Man creates gods; not gods man. Men are absolutely indispensable to gods; but men can do very well without gods if it pleases them to do so."

"Has it pleased you to do so, Captain Brack?" I asked.

"Decidedly so. I sail light. Men make a slavery of this job of existence because they encumber themselves with laws, gods, and so on. I decided long ago not to be a slave to gods or anything." He turned upon me with his devilish smile. "Now, Mr. Pitt, it is easy to see, is a slave to his gods."

"Which gods, for instance."

He burst into ready laughter, as if I had fallen into a trap he had laid for me.

"The petty, insignificant gods of civilized conduct!"

"Hear, hear!" interjected Chanler, lazily blowing away the smoke. "What you two doing: making religious speeches? 'God,' you said. Stow that. There's no room for gods of any kind on board this boat."

"Except the gods of science," laughed Brack.

"Ha! Science! That's good, awf'ly good, cappy. You don't know how good that is. I'll stand for science, cappy, but not religion. Religion sort of suggests conscience, and conscience—m'boy, I cut the chap dead days ago and refuse to be re-introduced. One bottle to science, men, and then it'll be time to kiss our native land good-by. Pitt, if you've a tender woman's heart pining for you some place, better go send her your farewell message, 'cause cappy and I are going to make a wet evening of it until we sail in the interests of science! Glor - ee - ous, glorious science! Hah!"

I accepted his suggestion eagerly as a means to escape from the cabin. There was no woman pining for me; there was no woman in my life. I had no farewell message to send to any one. While Chanler, Brack and the doctor made merry over their bottle I sought the solitude of the upper deck.

IT WAS a dark night, and a rising wind was blowing in from the sea. Along the water-front lights twinkled and gleamed, mere red-hot dots in the all-encompassing darkness.

At a dock near by the outline of a long steamer showed beneath the flare of a myriad gasoline torches, and across the water there came from her decks the clang of hammers and the hollow rumble of trucks pouring freight into her hold.

"The *City of Nome*, sir," said a voice behind me, and turning I beheld the sturdy figure of Mr. Wilson, the second officer. "They're rushing the job of preparing her for her first trip of the season. She follows the *Wanderer* up. She'll be about forty-eight hours behind us."

"Will she overtake us?"

"Hardly, sir. We're as fast as she is, if not faster. No, we'll show her the way into Bering Sea if nothing happens to check our speed."

A sudden gust of wind shook us and a splattering of great rain-drops struck the deck. The mate turned toward the sea and sniffed the air.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as if the wind had told him something. "I hope you're a good sailor, Mr. Pitt; it may be a little rough outside tomorrow and for a couple of days to come."

VII

I WAS awakened next morning by a sensation as of mighty blows being struck against the yacht's hull, shaking it from stem to stem. My nostrils caught the tang of cold sea air, while gusts of fog-laden wind swept whistling past the open port-hole.

I dressed, went on deck, and swiftly retreated to shelter. The *Wanderer* was out at sea and boring her twelve-knot way through the smoke and welter of a raw Spring gale from the north.

The entire aspect of the yacht, of its personnel, and of the expedition seemed to have changed overnight. Captain Brack was upon the bridge. His neat, gold-braided uniform had vanished and he wore a rough sheepskin jacket and oilskin trousers. A shaggy cap was pulled down to his eyes and he chewed and spat tobacco.

In the gray light of a raw day, shuddering and washed by spray, the *Wanderer* had become a grim, serviceable sea-conqueror rather than the magnificent pleasure-boat she had seemed yesterday, and two seamen, roughly clad and dripping, were putting extra lashings on a life-boat forward.

I went down to breakfast with new impressions of the grim potentialities of this expedition.

I had breakfast alone. Chanler was still in his stateroom and the officers all had breakfasted long before. While I was eating, Freddy Pierce popped his head in.

"Oh, hello; it's you, is it," he greeted. "I was looking for the boss; another message."

"Mr. Chanler is in his stateroom," I said.

"He sent another message to this Jane—to Miss Baldwin, last night," said Pierce.

I continued to eat.

"This is a reply to it that I've got here."

"Pierce," said I, looking up, "you will find Mr. Chanler in his stateroom."

"Right!" said he. Saying which the messenger boy turned and ran. "Oh, Simmons! Come here. Message for the boss."

Simmons, who was passing, paused and bestowed on Freddy his most freezing look of disapproval.

"Mr. Chanler is not to be disturbed," said he, and made to pass on.

"Not so, old Frozen Face," said Freddy, catching him by the arm. "You don't pass me by with a haughty look this time. This is the reply to the message the boss sent last night. He wants it while it's hot off the griddle. Get busy."

Simmons seemed about to choke.

"Mr. Chanler is not to be disturbed," he repeated with emphasis.

Freddy turned toward Chanler's door.

"Will you take it in—or shall I?" he asked.

"But you can't—it is forbidden!" cried Simmons.

Freddy knocked loudly on the owner's door.

"The reply to your message from last night, Mr. Chanler," he called. "It just came."

An instant later he opened the door, to Simmons's horror, and entered. When he came out he bore another message and went straight up to the wireless house to send it.

Soon after this Captain Brack came to Chanler's stateroom, knocked and entered. He remained within for some time. When he emerged his look was dark and scowling, and he hurried straight to the bridge. A moment later the *Wanderer's* twelve-knot rush began to diminish, and presently we were moving along at a speed that seemed barely sufficient to keep our headway against the sea.

Not long after this came the clash between Brack and Garvin.

I was starting on my morning constitutional when I came upon the pair facing one another on the fore-deck. Chanler was looking on from the bridge. Garvin was an unpleasant-looking brute to behold. His face was swollen and he had evidently slept in his clothes. He was standing lowering ferociously at Brack, who stood leaning against the chart-house, his arms folded.

"Sa-a-ay, sa-a-ay guy; what kind uv a game d'yah think yah're running? Eh?" the fighter was snarling. "What d'yah think yah're putting over on me? Hah? D'yah know who yah got hold of? I'm Bill Garvin."

"That is how I have put you down—as one of the crew," said Brack. He placed himself more firmly against the wall of the wheel-house.

"Put—put me down?" cried Garvin incredulously. "Me—one of your crew? Guess again, bo, guess again."

"I never guess," retorted Brack and there was just a warning hint of coldness in his tones.

"Wa-ll, git next tuh yerself den, bo, an' quit dat crew talk wid me. When do we git back tuh Seattle?"

"Perhaps never — for you — unless you soon say 'sir' when you speak to me."

"Hah?"

"'Sir!'" bellowed Brack, and even the sodden plug-ugly blinked in alarm at the menace in his tones. But only for a moment. He was a true fighting brute, Garvin; his courage only swelled at a challenge.

"Step out here an' put up yer mitts, Bo," he snapped. "I'm Bill Garvin; who the —— are you?"

From the bridge came Chanler's cynical cackle.

"He wants an introduction, cappy," he chuckled. "Come, come; let's have your come-back."

Brack smiled in his old suave manner as he looked up at Chanler, but as he turned away the smile changed to a black scowl. He looked steadily at Garvin for several seconds, and it grew very quiet.

Garvin started a little in surprise and fright, as if suddenly he had seen something in Brack's face which he had not expected to find there. He was a stubborn fighting brute, however, and instinct told him to charge when in fear. He leaped at Brack, his fists held taut; and an instant later he was on his back on the deck, screaming in agony, his hands covering his scalded face.

Then for the first time I saw the hose-nozzle that the captain had concealed beneath his folded arms. He had been standing so that his broad back entirely concealed the hose, running from a fire-plug in the wall. So the fighter had rushed, open-eyed, open-mouthed, against a two-inch stream of hot water which swept him off his feet and left him groveling and screaming on the deck.

"Ha!" said George Chanler. "Sharp repartee that, cappy—though a bit rough."

Brack found Garvin's hands, neck, head with the water, and suddenly turned it off.

"Don't!" cried Garvin. "For Gawd's sake, don't."

"Sir," said Brack.

"You go to ——!"

The water found him again.

"Sir."

"Sir," whimpered Garvin. "Oh, Gawd! You've killed me!"

"Sir."

"Sir."

Brack tossed the hose aside and wiped his hands.

"Take him below," he directed a couple of seamen. "Tell Dr. Olson to care for him. I have too much need for Garvin to have him lose his sight."

He turned abruptly toward Chanler on the bridge.

"The wind is rising, sir," he said. "At five knots we will barely crawl."

"Yes?" said Chanler, yawning. "Well, crawling is exactly my mood today."

"We'll lose precious days up north if we continue at this speed."

Chanler smiled the shrewd smile of a man who has a joke all to himself.

"No, cappy; that's once you're wrong.

It's just the other way round: I'd lose precious days if we didn't continue at this speed, as you'll see when the time comes."

The captain glared after him as Chanler leisurely went aft to his stateroom. The glare turned for an instant to a smile, of a sort that Chanler would have been troubled to understand had it been seen. Then Brack stamped forward and stood with folded arms, looking ahead over the gray, tossing sea, his face raging with impatience over the slowness of the yacht's progress.

VIII

I CLIMBED to the wireless house and found Freddy Pierce eagerly looking for my appearance.

"Did you see it?" he demanded. "Did you see it?"

"Brack and Garvin? Yes, I saw it. It was horrible. Is that the way Brack handles the men of the crew?"

"Na-ah! I should say not. That isn't his regular system. He don't need to touch 'em; he laughs at 'em and scares 'em stiff. He's got a fighting grouch on this morning, and Garvin was just something to take it out on. Poor Garvin! He had to come staggering up and make his play just after the captain come out of the boss's cabin boiling mad. Any other time the cap' would 'a' laughed at him so he'd snuck back to his bunk like a bad little boy."

"Then what was wrong with the captain this morning?"

Freddy shrugged his shoulders.

"You notice we cut our speed down to a crawl, didn't you? Well, it must have been that that gave Brack his grouch. I haven't quite got it doped out yet. All I know is, I grab a bunch of words off the air for the boss, I take him the message, he reads it, smiles, slips me a double saw-buck for good luck and says: 'Kindly tell Captain Brack to step down here at once.' I do. Captain Brack goes in smiling and comes out with his eyes showing he'd been made to do something he didn't want to do. Bing! He gets Riordan on the engine-room phone. Zowie! He shouts an order. And then the screw begins easing off little by little, and pretty soon we've stopped running and are walking the way we are now. Dope: the boss made cappy cut her down, and it made cappy so sore he burnt Garvin's face half off to blow off his grouch."

"But why in the world should Captain Brack grow so angry over that!" I exclaimed. "Chanler is owner. Certainly it is to be expected that he can sail where, when and how he pleases."

"Sure. It got cap's goat, though."

"By Captain Brack's own statement we may have to wait for the Spring drift-ice to clear when we get up north. Surely there can be no sensible objection to slow running under the circumstances, especially as that is the owner's wish."

Pierce doubled up, grasping his thin ankles and staring at the floor, as was his custom when thinking seriously.

"Brack has been hurrying ever since we lay in 'Frisco. Hurried about the crew; took Wilson because he couldn't find another officer in a hurry; and, we ran at maximum all last night after we cleared the Sound."

"What of that?"

"That would take us to Petroff Sound just a week before we scheduled."

"Well?"

"On our schedule time we'd probably have to lay offshore a week before the ice breaks up so we could go in. Then what would be the sense of getting there a week ahead of schedule? I saw the log this morning, too, just after Brack'd written it. He had the night's run down at nine knots an hour; we were going better'n twelve. Put your noodle to working, Mr. Brains. What's the answer?"

"Apparently Captain Brack wishes to reach Petroff Sound ahead of our schedule."

"Without letting the boss know we were going to do it. Yep. Go on."

"It is impossible for me to guess at what his object may be."

"Same here, Brains. Brack isn't doing it just for the fast ride though, that's a cinch. Go on."

"Chanler's orders to slow down may be ascribed to one of his whims——"

"Huh!" interrupted Freddy. "I wish you were right there."

"Why?"

"The boss didn't play up a whim when he cut down our speed. He'd done some close figuring before he did that."

"How do you know?"

"I ought to know. I'm operator, ain't I? I handle his messages, don't I? Well, that's how I know."

"Then the order to slow down was not due to a whim, but to a message?"

"To the one he got this morning in reply to the one he sent last night. Yep."

"There seems, then," said I, "to be a conflict of interests on board; Captain Brack wishes to go fast and Mr. Chanler wishes to go slow."

"Yes," said Freddy Pierce, scratching his red head, "and if the captain's reasons are anything like the boss's I've got a feeling that you'll have some —— funny things to write about before we get back home. What's more, if one of 'em's got to have his way about the speed you can put your money on the captain and cash."

"Nonsense! Mr. Chanler is the owner."

"Yes, and Captain Brack is—Brack."

I recalled what I had heard Brack called back in Billy Taylor's in Seattle.

"Pierce," I said, "how much do you know about Brack?"

He cast a look of disapproval at me.

"You don't need to ask me that, Brains," he said. "I got eyes—I can see you got him sized up, too."

"You joined the *Wanderer* in San Francisco two weeks before I did," I reminded him. "Surely you know more about the man than I do."

"Well," he said, "I know that he's a devil with men."

"A masterful personality," I agreed. "Any one can see that."

"Yep. But that ain't what's worrying me."

"Worrying? Are you worrying about Brack?"

"Oh, sort of."

"Why?"

"Why," he said, as his instrument began to crackle. He turned to take a message. "Brack's a devil toward men, but that ain't a marker to what he is with women."

IX

WHILE I stood watching Pierce busied at his instruments Simmons came climbing up with word that Mr. Chanler wished me to come to his stateroom. The sky had begun to clear to the eastward by now; a rift of clean blue Spring heaven was showing through the great pall of Winter-like gray clouds; and as I entered Chanler's stateroom the sun broke through and relieved the ugly monotony of the raw day.

Chanler was trailing his mandarin-like dressing-gown behind him as he paced the room, and his face was not the face of a man at ease.

"Gardy," he said, "I want to talk with you. Got to talk with you. Brack's all right to drink with; Doc Olson doesn't talk at all; you're the only one fit to talk to on board. 'Member I started to tell you yesterday how I discovered I had to do something useful, and then I changed my mind and didn't tell you after all? Well, I'm going to tell you the whole story now. Gardy, how much do you know about women—girls?"

By this time I was prepared for any turn of thought on Chanler's part and replied—

"Not as much as you do, that's sure."

The careless reply seemed exactly what he wished to hear. He nodded gravely.

"That's right. You don't know how right that is. You may know a lot about 'em, Gardy, but I know more. I've learned a lot about 'em lately, a whole lot. You think that Brack, and those Petroff Sound mammoths, and old Doc Harper are responsible for this little trip we're on. Well, they're not."

He paused, then concluded slowly—

"Gardy, it's a girl."

I recalled Chanler's bachelor fear that some day a shrewd mama would snare him for her young daughter, and the determination with which he had fled whenever he found himself growing interested in a girl in a way that threatened his bachelor's liberty.

"Arctic Alaska is a long way to run away," I laughed.

"Hang it, Gardy!" he snapped. "Don't talk that way. I'm not running away."

"No?"

"No. I—I'm doing this because I want to—want to—I know it will shock you—but, hang it, Gardy! I want to marry her."

I had an uncomfortable series of visions: Chanler entangled by some woman, a light actress, probably; family objections, and George being sent away to the Arctic Circle while the family money convinced the woman that she had made a mistake.

"You mean that you're being sent up here?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, his chin sunk on his chest. "Yes, that's it; I'm being sent up here."

"By——"

"By—her." He looked straight out of the window, gnawing his underlip nervously. "By a little girl, almost a kid, by Jove!"

He paused again, then went on didactically:

"The trouble with girls, Gardy—young girls; pretty, clever, charming girls, you know—the trouble is they're too popular. Too many pursuers. Men are too eager to marry 'em. Fact. Girls have too many chances. Get an exaggerated idea of their own importance, and pick and pick before they decide on a chap, and then they demand that the one they've picked is—is a little, white god. Fact. Even the common ones. Ordinary man try to marry one—hah! Got to show 'em. Money? Oh, yes; big percentage, show 'em money and they don't ask anything else. Limousine and poodle-dog type.

"But, hang it, Gardy, there's a new kind of girl growing up in this country at present, and she's the one who makes a man trouble. New American breed. She doesn't look back over her shoulder to make you follow her. Hang it, no! She stands right up to you and looks you square in both eyes. She won't notice when you show her money; what she's looking at is you. Fact. Not what you got; but what you are. New type.

"Rotten world for men it's getting to be. Our own fault, though. We chase 'em; make 'em think themselves worth too much. Men ought to quit—lose interest. That'd bring 'em to their senses, and they wouldn't ask a man uncomfy questions. But hang it, it'd be too late now to do me any good," he concluded gloomily. "I'm shot."

I said nothing, and he soon went on.

"Shot, by Jove! Shot by a little girl. Just like a kid fresh from school. Hit so hard I've got to have her, and, hang it! She's one of that—that new kind."

Still I remained silent, and for many seconds Chanler struggled with his next words.

"Gardy!" he broke out in mingled anger and awe. "She wouldn't have me!"

Once more we sat in silence, an uncomfortable silence for me. I had no desire to discuss affairs of the heart with any one. Up to that time I had never felt the need of any woman in my life.

Presently Chanler opened his writing-desk and drew out a small photograph which he passed to me.

"There she is, there's the cause of this expedition, Gardy."

I looked with interest at the picture in my hand.

It was as poor a specimen of the outdoor picture as any amateur ever made on a sunny Sunday. It represented a bareheaded girl in tennis costume, her hair considerably tousled as if she had just finished a set; but as the picture had been taken against the sun the face was so dark as to be scarcely discernible. Just an ordinary outdoor girl, apparently, as ordinary as the photograph.

"That's the reason for this trip," said George, carefully returning the picture to its place. "She isn't anybody you know or have heard of. She's nobody. She's just a common doctor's daughter from a little town in the Middle West, and I want to marry her, Gardy, and by Jove — she wouldn't have me!"

He was started now, and there was no opportunity to stop him had I so wished. I listened in humble resignation. I was Chanler's hired man. I was engaged as his literary secretary, but probably he counted me paid for listening to him while he poured out his amazement and despair at having been refused.

"She wouldn't have me, Gardy," he repeated over and over again; and, considering how many girls had fished for Chanler's name and money, I wondered what sort of a girl this could be.

"I met her down at Aiken last Winter. She was visiting some folks—but that didn't count. I met her at the tennis court. By Jove!" A new light came into his cynical eyes, a clean light, and for the time being his face was almost fine. "Can't stand athletic girls as a usual thing, you know that, Gardy; but she—she was different."

They had danced together that night at the club ball. If she had been stunning on the courts, she was overwhelming in evening dress. He scarcely had dared to touch her.

They had spent a great part of the next day rolling slowly about country roads in one of his roadsters. Sometimes they had stopped at convenient points along the road and had sat silent and looked at each other. Again they had halted and picked flowers along the roadside. And between times they had rolled along at six miles an hour and—talked.

"Oh, hang it, Gardy. For the first time in my life I wished I was clever like you and had done something. It ain't fair. Nobody ever made me do a thing; what chance have I had to amount to anything? And then a fellow meets a girl like this, who likes you from the start and when she asks you what you're doing, or have done, or are going to do, and you say nothin', she looks at you in a certain way as if to say: 'Why, what excuse do you make to yourself for cumbering the earth?' No, by George, it ain't fair; is it, Gardy?

"I told her I had money, and she laughed and said she didn't understand how a man could be satisfied to have money and nothing else, and money that his father had earned at that. Then I asked her to marry me, so I would have something besides money. Hang it, old man, she cried. Yes, she did, just for a little while. Then she looked up and laughed at me, and said: 'George, I've known you less than two days, and I've learned to like you so much that I wish I dared like you more. But if I liked you any more,' she says, 'I'm afraid I'd want to marry you, and have to depend upon you for my future happiness, and to be the father of my children; and,' says she, 'you haven't the right to ask that, George, so long as you play around like a thoughtless boy, and do nothing that a man should do.'

"Jove! That was enough to make a fellow pull up and think, wasn't it? I said to myself right there: 'I'm going to do something.' And I am. I ain't clever like you, Gardy, and I haven't got business experience like some fellows, but—" he smiled with self-satisfaction—"I have got money."

It all ended there. He had money; he need have nothing else. The new look vanished from his eyes and they became cynical and supercilious again. His underlip protruded cunningly.

"Science is a great help if you know how to use it, Gardy," he chuckled. "What's your opinion of our little expedition now?"

"I don't see any reason why what you have told me should alter my opinion of the expedition."

"Ha! I thought maybe that old conscientious streak in you would get troublesome. You don't quibble about motives then, Gardy?"

"Why should I? I am your hired writing man——"

"Oh, hang it, Gardy! Don't put it that way. Don't be so precise. As one chap to another, you know—what do you think?"

"I see nothing wrong with your motive, Chanler. In fact, I think it rather fine. As I understand it you are undertaking this expedition because you wish to prove to this girl that you can and will do something useful."

"Right-o. That's why I undertook it—in the first place."

"That surely established an excellent motive, for a man in your sentimental frame of mind, at least."

"Yes," he said with a hollow laugh, "there's nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"And if the expedition is successful the results will be a credit to you—a genuine success—irrespective of what your motives might be."

"Now you're shouting, Gardy!" he cried vehemently, striking the desk. "The results, that's what counts. Not the motive or the means. Who asks a winner why or how? Win out! Get what you want! That's the idea. And, by Jove! What I want I get; and I want Betty Baldwin to be my wife!"

X

THE *Wanderer* wallowed her faltering way northward, a new atmosphere of sinister suggestion about her spray-damped decks. Yet even now, with Chanler's sudden confession ringing in my ears, I thought, not of him and his plans, not of the owner's empty stateroom furnished for a woman, not of the Miss Baldwin mentioned, but of Brack. Brack was the great force on board. Chanler might plan well or evil; but it would be Brack's will that would determine the fate of these plans, and of any one who came aboard. And I had not gaged Brack. Though by this time I was ready to credit him with Machiavellian cunning and power, my estimate of the man failed to do him full justice.

It was on the fourth day out that this conclusion was forced upon me. As Wilson had predicted, the weather remained rough and raw, and the *Wanderer* lifted and rolled leisurely through a smother of fog and spray from the long, slow North Pacific rollers.

In the middle of the afternoon the sun

broke through for a period, the fog disappeared, and I climbed to the wireless deck to enjoy the cheeriness of unwonted sunshine and Pierce's company combined. I found Pierce squatted on the starboard edge of the cabin roof, absorbed in watching the deck below. At the sound of my footsteps he looked up, grinned and crooked his finger for me to come to his side.

"Garvin's out again," he whispered. "He's just come up from the aft on the starboard side. Brack's forward just now, but he's been hiking the starboard promenade for the last five minutes. He's in a sweat again about our running half speed, and if Garvin doesn't see him and duck they're going to meet."

I looked aft and saw Garvin, the pugilist, standing bareheaded in the sunlight, steadying himself easily to the pitch and rise of the *Wanderer's* deck.

Surprise and relief came to me as I saw him look around, blinking against the sun. I had feared to hear that he had been blinded, or that he had been scalded so fearfully that he might succumb, or lie helpless for weeks. Yet here he was, save for the bandages that covered most of his face, apparently in better physical condition than when he had come aboard. In reality this was true. Two days of medical treatment and rest had given his splendid vitality that opportunity to throw off the load of alcoholic poison with which it had been surcharged. His bony face, hardened by training and blows, had withstood without serious damage the stream of boiling water that would have blinded, probably killed, a normal man.

As he moved slowly forward along the port rail in the bright sunlight there was none of the weakened, defeated look of a badly injured man about him. With his head and shoulders thrust forward, the short neck completely hidden, the long arms hanging easily, and moving with the sure step of the man whose muscular feet grip the ground, he was formidable to look at, a fighting animal, unafraid and undefeated.

"One bad, tough guy!" whispered Pierce in admiration. "Say, Brains, even money that he takes a swing at Brack before the cruise is over."

Brack had made a swift, impatient turn near the bow and was coming aft along the starboard rail. He was wearing his rough sea-clothes and he walked with his eyes on the deck, chewing tobacco viciously.

From the aft Garvin advanced slowly, and from the bow came Brack. And as I looked from one to the other now I was shocked with the impression that they were much alike. The same thickness about the neck and shoulders, the same sense of force about them both. But in Garvin it was a blind force, stupid and unenlightened as the force of a thick-necked bull, while in Brack the force was directed by one of the most efficient minds it had been my fortune to come in contact with.

"Pipe 'em off, pipe 'em off!" whispered Pierce excitedly. "They're going to meet face to face in the companionway. Brains, a dollar says there'll be something doing when Garvin looks up and sees himself alone with the guy who cooked him."

"Hush!" I warned.

A sudden stillness and tension seemed to have settled down on the yacht. Above a hatchway aft I saw the heads of a pair of the crew eagerly watching Garvin as his steps carried him toward Brack. In the bow the cook and Simmons followed the captain with their eyes; and from the bridge, Wilson, the mate, erect and stanch, looked down with his calm, serious expression unchanged.

And then they met. It was almost directly beneath where Pierce and I sat. They stopped and looked at one another. I had the sensation of a calm before a storm. And then——

"Hello, cap," said Garvin in a low voice, and I could see in spite of his bandages that he winked. "How's tricks?"

Brack smiled.

"All right, Garvin. How are you coming on?"

"Oh, I'm all right." Garvin stepped to one side. "Little thing like that don't bother me."

"Good!" Brack actually patted him on the shoulder. "You're the kind of man I want. I suppose you've taken worse beatings than that when it's paid you to throw a fight?"

"——! That wasn't even a knock-out. Just a little hot water. I'd take more'n that to be let in on a job like this."

"That's the way to talk," said the captain heartily. "And this will bring you more than any fight you ever won or lost."

That was all. They passed on, Brack toward the aft, Garvin toward the bow.

I looked at Pierce. He shivered slightly.

"I feel cold," he whispered.

I looked up at Wilson. His eyes had widened a little. He swung around and began to pace the bridge. He knew what his duty was; he would do it no matter what went on between captain and crew.

"It's getting chilly," said Pierce.

We retired to the wireless house. Pierce shut the door and stared at me.

"Now what—now what do you make of that, Brains?"

I shook my head. I, too, felt inclined to shiver.

"Something's wrong, Brains, something's wronger than a fixed fight. The captain's framing something. He's let Garvin in on it. What is it—what is it? Can you dope it out?"

"No. Perhaps you're mistaken."

"Don't talk that way; you know better'n that. Come to bat. Didn't you hear him say this'd get him more'n he ever got in a fight? Garvin's got thousands. The cap's framed something, and he's taken Garvin in. Now, what is it? I've had a hunch something was going on. I'm all ice below the ankles. What d'you s'pose they're going to do? By God! I wouldn't put it past 'em to steal the yacht!"

"Easy, Pierce," I laughed. "People don't do such things nowadays."

" 'People don't'? D'you call Brack and Garvin 'people'? Garvin's a gorilla and the captain's—Brack. Come on. Brains, can't you dope out what they're framing?"

"Roll yourself a cigaret," I advised laughingly. "If you're so eager to find out what Brack is planning, suppose we ask him?"

"Don't," he sputtered, horrified. "Don't do anything like that."

"Why not?"

" 'Why not?' " he repeated, growing calm. "Oh, just because I kind o' like your company and I don't want you to go overboard into the briny."

I laughed. Pierce, I felt, was given to extravagant expressions.

At dinner that evening I sat down resolved to lead the conversation around to Garvin's new-born docility, but, face to face with Brack, I admit that I feared to attempt it. I was no match for him. His terrible eyes, I felt, would have read the thoughts in my mind try as I might to hide them, and I smiled and replied as best I could to his sallies, and wondered in vain over what was going on behind that gross, smiling mask.

The weather grew suddenly rougher toward the end of the meal.

"That's the tail of it," said Wilson in reply to my question. "Now we're getting the blow that has been chasing the rough weather down from the north, where it's been a lot worse than we've been having. It'll kick up hard for a few hours. Ought to die down and clear off by tomorrow morning."

The smashing storm drove Brack and Wilson to their duties on deck. Riordan went, too, presently, and while Chanler and Dr. Olson, agreeing that the dining salon was the best place on a night like this, ordered another bottle, I found an oilskin and sou'wester and followed.

As I stepped out on deck I wished for a moment to be back in the warm, lighted cabin. The wind had increased to what seemed to me a tornado, and the night was so dark that only in the beam of the *Wanderer's* search-light could one see the tossing water.

The sea had changed with the rising of the wind, and in place of the long, slow rollers, sharp, spiteful waves shot their crests high over the yacht's bridge, and with the driving rain which was falling made the decks uncomfortable, even dangerous. I recoiled from the dark, the wind and the rain.

A gust of wind and a slanting deck swept me off my feet and sent me slithering on my knees, gasping for breath, into the scuppers. I grew angry. My anger was with myself. I was timid, and I was weak; and, so, moved probably by some inherited streak of stubbornness, I forced myself to my feet, forced my face to meet the wind and rain without flinching, and so forced myself, much against a portion of my will, to remain outside, with the warmth and comfort of the cabin only a step away.

The storm grew worse. A life-boat on the port side was torn loose from a davit and swung noisily along the side. Through the brawl of the storm Wilson's voice rang out sternly, there was a rush of feet on the deck and suddenly men were swinging the boat back to its place, making it fast, while the wind and waves snatched at them hungrily. Then the decks were empty again.

The wind strove to force me back to the cabin, and with a new stubbornness I refused to go. It was boyish, it was silly, but the harder the wind blew, the more the spray drenched me, the more determined I was to remain. I began to glow with the struggle.

New and strange sensations came and went. I felt an inexplicable desire to shout back at the storm. For the first time in years I was thrilled by the impulse of a physical contest, and I fought my way to the bow and stood spread-legged, leaning forward against the wave-crests which drenched me. Then I went leisurely aft, hanging onto the rail, denying the wind the right to hurry me. And in the noise and darkness I all but walked squarely into Captain Brack and Riordan.

They were standing in the lee of the engineer's cabin. I did not see them, for I was moving by hand-holds along the cabin wall when, in a lull of the storm, I heard their voices and stopped.

"You got a bad one, sir, when you picked Larson," Riordan was saying.

"Larson?" repeated Brack, as if trying to place the name. "Oh, the young hand from the Sound boat? What's wrong with him?"

"He knows Madigan."

"——!" said Brack. "Is he the only one?"

"Yes. I've sounded the others a second time to make sure. But Larson knew Madigan in some little town up the Sound. What's more he's no good to us. He's ambitious and he's working for a mate's certificate, got a good family, and he won't keep his mouth shut. I know he won't."

Brack made a sound in his throat like a bear growling.

"Oh, yes he will," he said. "I'll have a talk with him. He'll keep his mouth shut when he understands there's something in it for him. He's one of the lookouts tonight, isn't he? All right. Tell Garvin I want to see him in your cabin in half an hour."

"Yes sir."

A door slid open and shut as Riordan slipped back into his cabin, and I heard Brack's heavy breathing as he came around the corner toward where I was hiding.

I retreated, swiftly and noiselessly, and slipped back into my stateroom. All hope that Pierce's interpretation of Brack's conversation with Garvin was wrong now had vanished. Brack was plotting something, and Riordan was partner to it, whatever it was. I did not sleep much that night.

In the morning I went in to breakfast early and found Wilson sitting staring at a cup of black coffee which he had ordered. One glance at the gravity of his lean, brown face and I knew that something was wrong.

"What has happened, Mr. Wilson?" I asked nervously.

Without lifting his eyes he said—

"Lookout Larson was swept overboard and lost from his watch last night."

XI

I SAT staring across the table at Wilson for many minutes before my wits returned to me. The mate's words seemed too awful to be true; they seemed words heard in a hideous nightmare. Throughout the night I had fought and denied the still whisperings of potential horrors aboard which had striven for room in my thoughts; and here the blackest depths of these horrors were realized by Wilson's simple words. For in my mind's eye I did not see the picture that his words should have conjured up: of a seaman swept from his post, falling into the sea by mischance, drowning in the dark, without a chance to be saved—I saw Brack talking to young Larson, I saw the brutal gleam of Garvin's bandaged eyes, I saw— Good God! I was afraid to admit to myself what I did see.

"Lost?" I repeated stupidly. "You mean drowned?"

"Yes sir."

"Good God!" I chattered. "How can you sit there and talk about it so calmly."

"I have followed the sea since I was fourteen, Mr. Pitt," he replied respectfully. "I have seen many men lost, good men, better men than myself. The sea is hard."

"But how—how could it happen?"

"I don't know, sir; it wasn't in my watch."

As he rose to go he added, with a puzzled shake of his head—

"He was a good seaman, too, Larson was, and a clean, sober young fellow."

I was still too much of the coward, still too much the indoor man, to face brutal facts honestly.

"But it must have been an accident!" I said. "An accident might overtake even a good and sober seaman."

"Yes sir," said Wilson.

"You don't think it was anything but an accident, do you?"

He thought for a while before replying.

"Well, sir, Larson and the rest of the crew didn't get on together. He was from the Sound, you see, sir, and the rest of the hands, except Garvin and the negro, were shipped at 'Frisco. Larson was different from them, sir; he was young, and sober, and ambitious. He came from a good family in Portland, and he had his whole life in front of him, and he was living it so he was bound to rise, sir. He was a credit to the *Wanderer*, Larson was, sir."

"Then you mean that the rest of the crew is not?"

"I didn't say that, sir."

"It was what you meant, though."

"I don't say so. I said that Larson and the rest of the crew didn't get on together. He kept himself apart, and they saw he was too good for them, and they had trouble."

"What do you mean by trouble?"

"Well, for one thing he wouldn't join their crap-game, and they had words and Larson smashed a couple of their faces."

"Good Heavens, Wilson! You don't mean to say that you think the crew was responsible——"

"No, sir. I don't say anything of the sort."

He opened the door to step out.

"Wilson!" I said. "Do you think everything is right on board?"

"I don't, sir," he said promptly. "I would be blind if I did. But I know that I am right, sir, and I know my duty to my ship."

Chanler came in for breakfast at that moment. He was apparently pleased at something, but at the sight of our faces his expression changed. He stood for a few seconds, looking first at Wilson, then at myself, greatly displeased.

"You're a fine looking pair of grouches for a man to look at first thing he gets up," he said irritably. "Hang it! Here I've had my first decent night's sleep in months: get up feeling like a boy, by Jove! And here you chaps greet me with faces that look like before the morning drink. I won't have it, you hear! You're too sober both of you, anyhow. Hang you water-wagon riders! Smile—you! Can't you look cheerful when you see I want it?"

A slight flush showed beneath Wilson's tan.

"Not this morning, sir," he said.

"Hah?" Chanler looked at him, looked at me, with alarm in his eyes. "What's the matter? Eh? Whatd' you know—what're you so serious about? Out with it, Wilson? What is it?"

"Lookout Larson was swept overboard and lost in the dog-watch last night, sir."

Chanler sank into his chair, actually relieved.

"Hang it! Is that all——"

"Good God, Chanler!" I cried springing up. " 'Is that all?' Isn't that enough?"

He looked at me, surprised and a little amused.

"Hello! Getting excited, Gardy? I didn't think you had it in you."

"I didn't think you had this in you, Chanler!" I retorted indignantly. "Didn't you hear Wilson say that one of the men—Larson, a fine young man—was drowned last night, while we slept?"

He looked at me steadily.

"Yes, I heard," he said carelessly.

"And you said, 'is that all?' And it was a relief to you. Did you expect to hear something worse than that—that one of your seamen had lost his life?"

"Gardy," he said softly, "who do you think you are talking to?

"I don't know," I said hotly. "I thought I knew you, Chanler. I find I am mistaken."

"By Jove, Gardy!" he repeated. "I didn't think you had it in you."

"Oh, drop that! That's a pose, Chanler, and this is no time for posing. A man has lost his life from your yacht, and you are relieved because that is all. What sort of a condition of affairs is this?"

"I didn't think you had it in you, Gardy," he repeated. "No, I didn't think you'd dare to talk to me this way face to face."

"Dare!" I cried, and he sat up and looked at me strangely.

"By Jove! Gardy, you're growing. The sea air is doing wonders for you. As for this chap—this hand—what's his name, Wilson——"

"Larson, sir."

"Larson. He was paid and paid well, and came on board of his own free will."

"And your feeling of responsibility ends there?" I asked.

"Feeling of responsibility? My dear, excited Gardy! What are we going to have—a lecture on the responsibility of employer to employed, and that sort of rot?"

"No," I said, "it would be wasted here."

"Sensible man. Wilson, you may tell Captain Brack to step in, please."

Brack came promptly, bustling in with a smile on his face.

"H'LLO, cappy," said Chanler indolently. "I hear we had an accident last night."

"Yes sir."

"Well—" Chanler's face was working angrily—"Well, after this if anything unpleasant happens you give orders to keep it from me until after breakfast, d'you hear? I don't like to hear of unpleasant things; I don't like it. This—thing has spoiled my appetite for the whole morning!"

"Why not," I said, staring hard at Brack, "why not ask Captain Brack to prevent such accidents from happening?"

"Hah?" Chanler started at the sound of my voice; I was startled at it myself. Even Brack's smile vanished. "What's this, Gardy—some more of your unpleasant rot? I won't have it: I——"

"For I am sure if Captain Brack utilized his great ability in an effort to prevent accidents such as happened to young Larson, they would not occur."

Not a shade did Brack's florid face lose in color, not a flicker of change showed in his eyes. But he drew himself up a little, and in that moment I knew that my worst fears concerning the loss of Larson were true.

"Mr. Pitt flatters me, I fear," said Brack, smiling again. "I——"

"You 'fear'? " I said. "What do you fear? Have you any reason for using the phrase, 'I fear,' Captain Brack? It sounds so strange on your lips."

He looked at Chanler and back at me.

"Mr. Pitt flatters me, I think," he said, his old smile back in place. "Does that sound better?"

Guilty! As guilty as the devil, he was, and I knew it; yet he stood and smiled as if nothing was wrong in the world; not a thing troubling his conscience.

"Gardy, you're—unpleasant company this morning, I must say that," interrupted Chanler. "Why, hang it! Captain, what d'you suppose he's been putting up to me? That I ought to feel responsible about this hand, Carson, Larson, whatever his name was. Now he's jumping on you. You ought to be responsible too, I suppose. Gardy, you're impossible."

The captain smiled upon me tolerantly. Chanler's explanation of my words and wafted away the whispers of suspicion.

"Mr. Pitt, having an exaggerated idea of the value of a human life, is greatly upset by our accident. I appreciate his condition. If his philosophy were less tainted with sentimentality——"

"I might smile over the loss of a young, hopeful life? Thank you, that is a mental level which I hardly hope to achieve."

I went out on deck and climbed up to the wireless house. Pierce greeted me with a sorry shake of the head.

"Gee! That was a dirty shame about poor Larson. He was the only white man in the crew. If anything had to happen why couldn't it happen to one of the bums?"

I saw that Pierce knew nothing that might make him suspect that Larson's disappearance was not accidental and I told him hurriedly of the conversation between Riordan and Brack which I had overheard last night.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned. "The dirty dogs! Young Larson, as nice a lad as you ever talked with, against Brack, and that gorilla, Garvin! Oh, they're a fine bunch of crooks, the bunch in this crew. As fine a bunch o' crooks as ever went to sea to duck the police. Brack and Riordan picked 'em, you know, in San Fran'. Wilson's all right, and besides him I think they made just one mistake in their picking."

"How so?"

"The nigger they got at Seattle. He's a crook, too, but he certainly has got it in for Garvin."

The rest of that day was a trying one to me. Save for Pierce, Wilson and myself, not a soul on board seemed to have a single serious thought about Larson's disappearance. The weather had cleared; the wind had shifted to the south and was only a gentle breeze; the sun was shining; and to the rest of the company life aboard the *Wanderer* seemed like a holiday.

Chanler seemed both elated and impatient. At times he lolled in a deck-chair and chaffed me good humoredly, and the next moment he would be up, pacing the promenade nervously.

"Gad! Time goes slow, doesn't it, Gardy?" he exclaimed half a dozen times during the day. "Well, we'll have a little something to break the monotony soon. The *City of Nome* will overtake us about nine tomorrow morning."

And Captain Brack, as he heard, smiled secretively; and I wondered what joke he might be keeping to himself.

Next morning at dawn a rush of feet outside my stateroom put an end to my efforts to sleep. I dressed and went on deck. A seaman came hurrying past, running toward an excited group gathered on the after-deck. I shouted to ask the cause of the excitement.

"We've run a man down in an open boat at sea," he called back, "and he's lousy with gold!"

XII

I FOLLOWED the man, caught by the electricity of excitement which seemed to dominate all on deck.

On the after-deck of the *Wanderer*, near the rail, was a long settee, and about this eight or nine men were grouped closely. In the half light of dawn their figures loomed bulkily and strangely alike. As I drew near I made out Captain Brack, Riordan and Garvin. Pierce was there, too, I saw on closer scrutiny, in the center of the throng, apparently as excited as any of them.

A black figure, dripping wet, was lying on one end of the settee. I saw that it was a man, and that Dr. Olson was bending over him, a bottle of brandy in his right hand.

"He's coming to again," said the doctor. "He'll be all right."

No one paid any attention; not a man turned to look. They were bending over something that lay on the other end of the settee, and so eager were their attitudes that I, too, paid no attention to Dr. Olson, or the man he was nursing, but crowded in among the close-pressed shoulders for a sight of what the magnet might be.

"Go-o-old!" the pugilist, Garvin, was repeating in awe-stricken whispers. "Go-o-old! My Gawd! Look at it. And he said there was barrels of it—barrels—where that comes from!"

A water-soaked canvas bag, roughly slit open, was spread out on the settee. What appeared to be a score or so of small pebbles was lying on the canvas, beside what seemed to me to be a handful of sand; but at that moment the first rays of the sun reached the *Wanderer's* decks, the pebbles and sand began to gleam dully, and I saw that I was looking at a pile of gold nuggets and gold dust.

"Two men to carry him below, cap'n," came Dr. Olson's voice from the other end of the settee. "He's all right; in surprisingly good condition; but we've got to strip him and get dry clothes on him."

Not one of us turned our heads. The others were fascinated by the gold, and I was fascinated by the expression on their faces. Each face bore the same expression; to a man they had dropped such masks of civilization as they possessed, and greed, pure, primitive greed, shone frankly from their strangely lighted eyes.

Life—raw and crawling! Brack's words flashed through my mind. He was right, then. Raw and crawling! It was the first time I had viewed the souls of men, naked and unashamed of their nudity, and the vision was appalling.

"Schwartz—Dillon," Captain Brack spoke over his shoulder. "To the doctor. Jump!"

The two men named withdrew reluctantly. I heard them marching behind, bearing the dripping man below, but I did not turn to look. My eyes were on Garvin. He was standing so that I had a fair view of his eyes and his unbandaged mouth, and I stared in fascination, as one is fascinated by something grewsome, which one has not believed possible.

I became conscious that somebody was watching me. It was Brack. He was smiling.

"Raw and crawling, Mr. Pitt," he said, reading my thoughts like print. "You wouldn't believe it when I told you; but there it is, all over Garvin's face. Now what do you say?"

Garvin swung his head around viciously.

"What's the matter with my face?" he snarled.

"It is the face of a frankly carnivorous animal with a bone in sight," laughed

Brack, "and it does not please our friend, Mr. Pitt."

"Oh, him!" said Garvin, turning back. "To —— with him."

"To —— with everybody!" growled another man. "Look at it—gold! And he said he just scraped that up with his bare hands."

"And it's only a few hundred miles away —the place he got it."

"And we're going up north hunting bones, for thirty a month! ——!"

"Enough!" With a swoop of his hands Brack gathered the gold into the bag and stuffed it into his pocket. "Get out! Get below!"

He swept them out of sight with a commanding gesture. They went, but they looked back with threats in their excited faces.

"YOU have seen it now, Mr. Pitt," Brack said, turning to me. "What do you say now—is not life raw and crawling?"

"As an exhibition of the primal instinct of greed the spectacle was quite worth seeing," I replied. "Now tell me what it was all about?"

"This!" said he, striking the bag of gold in his pocket. "All about this. For this the man whom we picked up in an open boat a short time ago risked and all but lost his life. For this the men of the crew are ready to cut the throats of any one who opposes them. And why? Because it is gold. Because it is power; because it means the gratification of all that is encompassed in—life.

"So you see what is behind life, with all its veneer and politeness, Mr. Pitt. The primal instincts, as you expressed it—raw and crawling. You must excuse me now; I must go down and see the man we picked up. If he should happen to die it would not be right to let the secret of the source of this gold die with him. Besides, I want Olson to save him. He can take Larson's place in the crew."

I walked to the bow of the *Wanderer* and back. A new atmosphere seemed to have descended upon the yacht. The movements of the men of the watch, the sullen, slovenly manner in which they attended to their duties, reeked with menace. It seemed to me that the decks of the *Wanderer* merely hid a cauldron of seething elements, ready to explode and destroy.

Then Wilson came on deck to take the watch in Captain Brack's absence, and at the sight of his trig seaman's figure I felt assured. There was one man at least who had not lost his sense of duty toward ship and owner. The yacht might be a mad-house, surcharged with dangerous greed, but Wilson would do his duty as if nothing were out of the way.

"Yesterday morning we had news of losing a man, this morning we pick one up," I said.

"Yes sir," he said, and looked at me narrowly.

"A strange coincidence."

"Yes sir." He looked at me again, and turned his eyes out over the sea.

"Mr. Pitt," he said after awhile, "yesterday you spoke of Larson's disappearance as if you believed it might have been something besides an accident, and that things were not as they should be aboard. Well, now I know that you are right; things are not as they should be on this yacht."

"What have you discovered?"

He took his time about replying.

"That man never was picked up in an open boat at sea, Mr. Pitt," he said quietly. "The land where he claims to have come from is about six hundred miles away. No small boat could have lived five minutes in the storm we have been having, and that storm was stronger farther north."

He spoke as if he were stating an ordinary fact, and his calmness helped me to control myself.

"What does it mean, then, Wilson?" I asked as easily as I could.

"I don't know, sir. I'm a seaman; I can't follow such a queer course. I only know that this man was not picked up, after a long voyage as he claims; because his boat could not have lived through."

"Captain Brack must know that, too?"

"Any seaman who has sailed these waters in Springtime knows that, sir."

"Yet Brack seemed to accept the man's story as true. Oh!" I gasped as I saw him smile. "Then it was Captain Brack who claimed to have picked him up?"

"I can't discuss that, sir; Captain Brack is my superior. But I know that what I have told you is the truth; and I thought it right you should know."

"Why do you tell me, Wilson? Mr. Chanler is the owner."

"Yes sir." He hesitated a moment, then added: "You are near to the owner. You'll tell him if you see fit."

XIII

CHANLER was in fine fettle that morning. He arose early, snatched a cup of coffee for breakfast and came out to pace the deck, frequently turning his glasses on the horizon over the yacht's stern.

"Greetings and salutations, Gardy!" he exclaimed as we met. "Down with the long face, up with the merry-merry! Hang it, Gardy, get enthused. Can't you see I'm actually not bored this morning?"

Captain Brack soon appeared with a detailed account of the new man's adventures. The man had been one of the crew of a sealing schooner which had been blown far off its course and lost the Autumn before with all hands, save our man and one companion.

Clinging to an upturned boat they had been driven ashore in an inlet which appeared on no map of Alaska to that date, a region so secluded that the man called it the "Hidden Country." The pair had wintered precariously. With the beginning of the Spring break-up they had discovered that in the upper reaches of a river running into the inlet they had but to turn up the sand and find gold in quantities unheard of.

Rendered desperate by lack of food, they had set forth in their open boat in hope of somehow striking the first steamers going North. The man's companion had died of hardships two days before. They had called the inlet Kalmut Fiord, after the wrecked sealer; it was so well hidden behind an island that a thousand boats might sail past and never guess of its existence, never know there was a hidden country there in which nature had hoarded a great amount of the stuff men prize above all other things material.

"By Jove!" cried Chanler, as Brack finished. "Sounds like a book, doesn't it? Have the beggar up, cappy, and let's have a look at him; let's see the gold and hear his story."

We were sitting on the long settee in the stern at the time. A couple of hands were working near by, polishing brass work.

As word was sent below to bring the miner up, the number of men near by gradually increased to half a dozen, and half of these loafed around boldly, making no pretense at being occupied. They looked at Chanler and myself with hard, insolent eyes. They did not fancy the notion of going bone-hunting for wages while fortunes waited to be dug from the sands of the nearest shore.

I looked idly back over the yacht's wake. On the horizon appeared what seemed to be a peculiar cloud. I watched it curiously, and saw that with each minute the cloud grew larger. It became a long smudge on the horizon, and I was about to call Chanler's attention to it, when——

"*City of Nome* overhauling us, sir!" megaphoned Pierce from the wireless house. "They say: 'Heave to. Have passenger for you.' "

"Ah, ha!" cried Chanler springing up, for the moment his blasé countenance flushing with life. "Never mind about the gold-hunter, cappy. We'll have him another time. Just have Riordan shut down, will you, and lay to for our passenger?"

He started for his state-room, when, seeing the men lounging about, he added:

"Send 'em below, cappy. They look tough; they'd give any one a bad impression. Simmons! Come here."

Not a man moved. No order was given as he had requested. Captain Brack laughed shortly and went forward to the engine-room telephone.

The men smiled with an evil showing of teeth at Chanler's retreating back. When he had disappeared in his stateroom they spat generously upon the *Wanderer's* immaculate deck, lounged over to the rail and stood looking back toward the rapidly approaching steamer. I stared at them with a sickening weakness at my knees.

I scarcely noticed the steamer. For what had just taken place told as plainly as words that Chanler no longer was master of his own yacht, that the men, and Brack, had thrown off the cloak and were in open revolt.

The *City of Nome* came to a stop a good distance away to port. A boat, well loaded with baggage, and with four oarsmen and an officer in place, was swung briskly out from the davits and dropped into the water. A slender, be-capped figure, sheathed in a coat that reached from chin to ankles, flashed down the ladder and leaped to a seat in the stern. Along the rail of the *City of Nome* ranged crew and passengers, waving and shouting farewells. The passenger in the boat stood up bowing, cap in hand, and at that a sharp-eyed seaman near me blurted out:

"Well, I'll be ——! It's a woman—a girl!"

Wilson was standing near our lowered ladder, looking through his glasses, and I hurried to him.

"Was the man right, Mr. Wilson?" I asked. "Is it a woman?"

"Yes sir," said he and handed me his glasses.

I placed them to my eyes, swept the sea until I picked up the boat, and let the glasses rest on the passenger in the stern.

The seaman was right; it was a girl. She was probably twenty-one or two, and she was laughing. I had but a glimpse of her face, for as the men pushed off from the steamer she leaned forward and spoke to the officer in charge. The men stopped rowing. One of them let go his oar and crawled forward, and the girl took his place and swung the long oar in a fashion that brought cheer after cheer from the watching passengers and crew.

Chanler now emerged from his stateroom and took the glasses from my hand. For several seconds he studied the girl in the boat as she swung herself easily against the oar.

"Gad!" he whispered excitedly. "Gad!"

He looked around and saw the men gathered aft.

"Wilson," he commanded, "drive that bunch below. Where's Brack? On the bridge? All right."

I moved away, but he called: "No, Gardy, you stay right here; you look civilized. I need you. Stay and get introduced."

I remained, but my interest was all for Wilson as he walked briskly toward the lounging men. Brack had been ordered to send the men below, and he had gone forward laughing, and the men had remained. Would they obey the command of the second officer?

Wilson's first order was given in a tone too low for us to hear. In reply the men grinned at him, and Garvin, through his bandages growled—

"Who the —— are you?"

Wilson's voice raised itself slightly.

"I am one officer on board that you can't talk back to or get chummy with," he said. "Get below or, by glory, I'll show you what it means to give slack to an officer. Move there! You—Garvin! Get below!"

And they went. Bad men that they were, and in revolt, they were not able to defy Wilson when his blood was up. Chanler looked up at the bridge, puzzled.

"I told cappy to send them below," he said. "Why didn't he do it?"

"He gave no order at all," I volunteered.

George looked at me unsteadily, his tongue wetting his lips.

"He didn't give any order—after I told him to?"

"No."

He looked up at the bridge again, hesitated, and smiled carelessly.

"Oh, well, what's the difference? Here's the boat. Ah! By gad!"

The boat was alongside our grating and the girl was springing out. A seaman offered to assist her, and she laughed and ran up the swaying stairway. Half-way she stopped and threw back her head, looking up at us.

"Yo-hoo, George!" she called and came running up the rest of the way, landing on the deck with a leap.

"Oh, George!" she cried. "Isn't it glorious!"

She turned to the rail and waved her farewells to the sailors in the boat. They touched their hats and rowed away, their eyes upon her.

"And what a beautiful yacht you've got, George. And, oh! This wonderful sea! Isn't it all splendid!"

She paused and looked at George carefully. The animation of her countenance disappeared for a moment; something she saw disappointed her.

"You—you're not—looking quite as well as you were, George," she said slowly.

"I've been awf'ly lonesome, Betty," he replied. "I—it was awf'ly good of you to come."

"Good of me? Why, it was a privilege. It was too sweet of your sister to invite me to come."

"No, no! Don't—don't say that. I—" He stopped confused. "Betty, I was desperate to see you—just see you, you understand."

She reached out and took his hand impulsively.

"You poor boy! And your sister, Mrs. Payne——"

Chanler was tugging at his collar.

"Here, here! I've forgotten," he interrupted nervously, "Here's Gardy—Miss Baldwin, Mr. Gardner Pitt."

And Miss Beatrice Baldwin looked at me squarely for the first time. Her look was frankly appraising. We shook hands. I do not remember that we spoke a word. She looked up at George Chanler's drink-hardened face; her eyes turned again to me, and after awhile she looked away.

There was a tiny up-flaring of lace about her neck. It was this picture that stuck in my mind: the delicate femininity of the lace collar, its suggestion of defenselessness, and, rising out of it, the firm, white neck, the slightly tanned face, girlishly delicate, but with the look on it of the outdoor girl who is not afraid.

Miss Baldwin was not afraid. She stood firmly upright; for my eyes, dropping in confusion, saw how the red rubber soles of her tan shoes gripped the deck, and the strong slim ankles above them. Her chin was almost childishly round, her hair was dark and wavy, and her mouth seemed eager to smile. Yet there was a seriousness about her frank eyes which told that while on the surface she might be a laughing, romping girl, in reality the woman was full grown.

There was a moment of silence while she looked out to sea and I looked at the deck; and then the men come rushing back on deck. They had been reinforced by two or three of their fellows, and with Garvin at their head they came marching forward in determined fashion.

At the sight of Miss Baldwin they paused. Some remaining shred of respect for womanhood held them, and they stood, a compact, menacing mob, some twenty feet away, undecided on their next move.

"Come along, Betty, I'll show you to your stateroom," said Chanler hurriedly.

He led the way toward the unoccupied owner's suite, the suite which from the beginning had been furnished for her coming.

Miss Baldwin hesitated.

"But where's Mrs. Payne, George?" she called.

Chanler paused and looked away. "Well, you see, Betty, I was crzay to see you, and—and, Sis' took ill, and—" He pulled himself together in desperation. "She didn't come with us, Betty, that's all there is to it."

Miss Baldwin had stopped at the cabin door.

"Then I am the only woman on board?" she asked.

"Yes."

I expected her to shrink, to demand that she be sent back to the *City of Nome*. Instead, she looked around calmly, looked out upon the sea, at the rough faces of the men who were staring at her curiously, at the free sweep of the *Wanderer's* deck and said with quiet resignation—

"Oh, how jolly!"

XIV

CAPTAIN BRACK and Riordan had joined the men by the time Chanler returned from showing Miss Baldwin to her stateroom. The entire crew of the *Wanderer* now was assembled, and Chanler ran his eyes nervously over the group.

"Cappy," he said, "what is the meaning of this?"

Brack stepped forward.

"Mr. Chanler," he said solemnly, "it has become necessary to tell you that this crew will not go to Petroff Sound—directly, at least."

Chanler looked around. The men were standing in a semicircle about him, watching him menacingly.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Do you mean that you refuse to fulfil your contract?"

Brack shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, for myself, I don't say," he said. "Perhaps I would be willing to go to Petroff Sound, even after picking up this gold-hunter. But that doesn't matter. I can't sail the *Wanderer* without the crew, and the crew refuses to go any place but to the hidden country at Kalmut Fiord, where this man's gold came from."

"That's what we said," supplemented Garvin. "Give us boats and grub, if you want to, and turn us loose; or go with us in the yacht. But we ain't goin' bone-huntin' when there's gold laying round loose so close by."

An inarticulate growl came from the rest of the men. Too stupid to put their plans in words they uttered a single, primitive sound which told better than Garvin's words what was working in their primitive minds. They had seen gold; they had been told there was enough of it to make them all rich; their sluggish desires had been aroused, and consequently they growled.

They were white men, as to skin, but they were savages at heart. And into this company Chanler had brought Miss Baldwin.

"Cappy," said Chanler, falling back into his blasé manner, "what are you trying to do? Do you mean to tell me that you're letting this crew walk over you? D'you mean to tell me that you no longer can run 'em? Come, come! I won't have such poppycock."

Riordan now stepped forward.

"It is not only the crew that wants to quit, Mr. Chanler," said he. "I'm through, too. Here is our proposition: Kalmut Fiord, where this miner came from, is about three days' sailing due north. We want to go there and take a look. If you'll let the yacht go there, and we find there's no gold there, we'll go on with you to Petroff Sound, and there's only a week lost, which you can dock from our pay. If you won't let the yacht go there—well, we're going there anyhow."

Chanler laughed his dry, cynical laugh.

"Cappy," said he, "this is what they call mutiny in stories, isn't it?"

"No, sir," said Brack promptly. "Mutiny is the refusal of seamen to obey their captain. None of these men has refused to obey me."

"Hah? Come again, cappy."

"I have given them no orders which they have refused to obey."

"You mean—you're in with 'em, eh?"

"I mean that it would be a crime against us for this expedition to continue on its original course without first investigating, at least, the story which the miner has told. There may be much gold there; certainly there is some. You have more money than you need, Chanler; we haven't enough to make our lives comfortable."

"This voyage is a pastime to you; to us it's a means of making a living. The bones at Petroff Sound will keep. I have this suggestion to make: that we alter the course of the yacht and go to Kalmut Fiord. There will be more credit for you if you lead the way to a new gold field than if you come back with a hold full of old bones. And it will be much easier and pleasant, I assure you."

"You—you're not threatening, cappy?" said George.

"Not at all. I am merely asking you to see this thing from our point of view."

" 'Our? Our point of view?' You're not one of the crew are you, cappy?"

Brack did not reply.

"What shall it be, Mr. Chanler?" he said curtly. "Petroff Sound or Kalmut Fiord?"

Chanler looked once more at the crew. He had no special reason for going to Petroff Sound, but as he saw himself defied by his servants a flare of anger showed in his eyes.

"This may not be mutiny, but it is —— insolent, cappy," said he "I can't say I like it at all."

Garvin laughed. Chanler, looking at Brack, waved a hand toward the pugilist.

"Kindly have that man removed, cappy."

The captain merely smiled; the scene was pleasing him. Chanler swore at him, and once more I saw that swift, terrible change come over Brack's countenance.

"Careful, Chanler," he said softly.

"Careful! On my own yacht!" Chanler's voice was strong, but his eyes were wavering before Brack's.

I stepped to his side, and as I did so, Miss Baldwin, a shimmering blue sweater in place of her rain-coat, and a tiny white tasseled cap on her head, came running out of the cabin toward us. Her eyes were taking in the *Wanderer's* beauty and her nostrils were quivering with excitement.

"Oh, what a jolly boat!" she cried. "George, take me round; I want to see it all at once."

Then she noticed the crew.

"Why!" She looked at the threatening faces of the men. "Why, George, what's the matter?"

Chanler laughed easily.

"Oh, nothing much, Betty. We picked up a man in a boat last night with a bag of gold nuggets on him, and he told a story about a new gold field in a hidden country not far away, and the men want to go there instead of to Petroff Sound, that's all."

Her eyes widened.

"Really, George?" she asked indredulously.

"Really," he said.

"But—do such things really happen, picking up men in boats with bags of gold on them?"

"It happened this time, at least," he replied.

"Oh, how perfectly thrilling! A hidden country. And there's more gold to find in the place he came from?"

"So the man says."

"Oh, George!" cried Miss Baldwin eagerly "let's go to this hidden country, and let me dig some gold with my own hands!"

Chanler looked puzzled, then relieved. Here was a creditable way out of an unpleasant situation, and his interest in Petroff Sound already was gone.

"Would you rather do that than go bone-hunting, Betty?" he asked.

"Of course. Wouldn't you? Who cares for old bones? And think of the thrill and adventures in exploring a hidden country and of hunting gold!"

Chanler turned and nodded curtly to Brack.

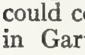
"We go to Kalmut Fiord then, cappy."

"All right, men," snapped Brack. They broke at his orders; he was the captain again. "Full speed ahead, Mr. Riordan, please; I'll take the bridge myself."

He stood for a moment looking at Miss Baldwin. When George introduced them she first looked at Brack's brutal features and wonderful eyes as casually as if he had been an ordinary member of the crew. Then her look became interested. After awhile she blushed and looked away, confused.

Brack bowed, and spoke and smiled courteously, but as he hurried up on the bridge there was a new look in his eyes. I could compare it only to the look that was in Garvin's eyes when he had seen the little raw pile of gold.

XV



THE *Wanderer* seemed galvanized into new life. The sullenness and tension that had hung over her decks all morning vanished as a fog vanishes before the rising sun. The men jumped to their tasks, grotesque grins on their faces where truculence had reigned a moment before.

Down below decks the engines began humming, slowly at first, rising steadily, until presently we were racing along at a speed that sent the water hissing along our sides. On the bridge Brack paced energetically, now speaking to the wheelman, now down the engine-room telephone. Our course was changed so abruptly that we felt the impact when the wheel went over, and minutes later we were holding steady and true on a course nearly at right angles to the one we had been following.

"Ha!" said Chanler. "Apparently cappy knows where he's going, and is going there as fast as the old scow can travel."

Miss Baldwin, bracing herself against the breeze, laughed nervously. Chanler reached down and took her hand. She looked up at him; then she drew her hand away.

I turned to go. A sailor, dragging a hose aft, blocked my way for a moment and I was forced to hear what they said.

"George," said she, "tell me the truth; did Mrs. Payne ever intend to come on this voyage? Or did you deceive me altogether?"

"I—I had to see you, Betty," he faltered. "I——"

"Don't say any more, please."

As I entered the cabin she was looking out over the sea. Chanler was chewing his under lip and staring hard at the deck.

I had barely settled myself in my stateroom to try to think coherently on the events of the morning when Freddy Pierce slipped in, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

"It's all right, Brains," he said. "Brack's too busy on the bridge to pay any attention to me. Let me roll one before you say anything; I'm forty miles up in the air."

"Pierce," I said, as he manufactured his cigaret, "what sort of message did Mr. Chanler send Miss Baldwin?"

"Ah ha! You'll let me tell you now will you? Well, he sent two kinds; one from himself, saying Mrs. Payne was on board, and one that he signed 'Dora Payne', inviting Miss Baldwin to come on this voyage. Oh, it's a fine piece of business, I tell you——"

"Stop!" I said. "Don't tell me any more; that's plenty."

He drew strongly at his cigaret and blew a shaft of smoke at the ceiling.

"And a Jane—I mean, a girl like that, for anybody to do what Chanler did! What's his game, Brains? He isn't so raw——"

"He isn't himself," I interrupted.

"That's the stuff; stick up for your pals. But, think of me. I had a hand in getting this girl on board ship." He rose and tramped the room. "Chanler must be crazy, especially after this morning, to let a girl come aboard. Can't he see what Brack is? And what do we know about where we're going now? It's bad enough for us; I'd blow the job myself if there was any way out and it didn't look like being a quitter; but for a girl like this to be pulled into it, it's a fine business—I don't think!"

"Pierce," said I, "could we get that steamer to turn back to us?"

"Sure—if Chanler would give the order. They know he can pay for their time, even if they are carrying mail."

"Then you may have a message to send them soon," I said, and went out to seek Chanler and Miss Baldwin.

I DID not find Chanler. Miss Baldwin was alone in a deck-chair under the awning on the forward deck. She was sitting with her chin in her hand, and to my surprise a look of relief came upon her face as she glanced up and saw me. Before I could speak she said.

"Mr. Pitt, what has happened to George Chanler?"

"Happened to Chanler?" I stammered. I tried to make light of it, but the look on her face stopped the foolish words on my lips.

"You know he is changed," she continued. "What has done it?"

"How do you mean he has changed," I asked.

"Don't, please don't try to deceive me?" She broke out. "I am not blind. I can see he has changed, and I can see that your attitude toward him is not what it would have been if he—if he were himself. You're an old friend of his?"

"I have known him for several years."

"So he said. Then you know he has changed. Why, he was like a good-natured boy last Winter; you couldn't help liking him. And now he is so different. What has happened to him?"

I looked at her, and her eyes were frankly searching me for the truth. The eyes were gray and very calm.

"There is a change in him," I admitted. "But I am still his friend."

Her eyes widened a little.

"Do you mean by that that you can't be my friend? Don't you think I have a right to know?"

"Chanler has been very lonely——"

"It's drink, isn't it?" she interrupted. "Don't be afraid to tell me; you can see I'm not afraid."

"He has been lonely," I continued, "and therefore he has probably been drinking more than is good for him. Now that you are here he will undoubtedly become himself again."

"Do you think so, really?"

"I do," I said earnestly. "How can he do anything else now?"

She rose and crossed over to the starboard rail. I followed. Looking aft I saw Simmons hurrying into Chanler's stateroom with a bottle wrapped in a napkin, and Chanler's absence was explained.

Miss Baldwin did not see Simmons. She was looking down at the water along our side. After several minutes she raised her head.

"Poor George!" she said, "He's never had to fight anything in his life, so he's handicapped. But we'll hope, at least."

"Miss Baldwin," I said vigorously, "it is not too late for you to leave this yacht. We can reach the *City of Nome* by wireless. You can return there now."

The look which she bestowed on me had nothing in it but surprise.

"Leave the yacht now, just at the beginning of the voyage? Why do you suggest that, Mr. Pitt?"

"I thought," I stammered, "I thought that after you had seen how things are on board you might be wishing you were safely back on the steamer."

"But—but you said my being here would help straighten George up?"

I was silent.

"Why did you suggest that I leave, Mr. Pitt?"

"Miss Baldwin," said I, "I do not wish to alarm you, but I do not think this yacht at present is a place for a young woman to take a pleasure trip in. It is Chanler's place to tell you this, but I am quite sure he will not do so."

"Go on," she said, "you must explain fully now."

"Well, to be blunt, the yacht is in the hands of Captain Brack and the crew."

"Yes?"

"You saw Captain Brack, Miss Baldwin; I saw that you studied him with interest."

"Yes!" she said eagerly, and at the sudden play of excitement in her expression I once more felt the old familiar chill creeping up my spine.

The power, the fascination, the dominant will of Captain Brack suddenly took on new possibilities. How would those terrible, compelling eyes affect a woman, a young girl? How had they affected her? For it was obvious that Miss Baldwin's brief meeting with him had left its mark.

"He has," said she, "such strange eyes."

"Miss Baldwin," I said, "when you came on board the crew practically was in a state of mutiny. Captain Brack sided with them. The crew is composed of a choice lot of brutes, ex-criminals, who may do Heaven knows what."

Miss Baldwin stood firmly upright and looked at me, her eyes alight with excitement. Her thin nostrils widened and trembled.

"Oh, how you thrill me, Mr. Pitt!" she said. "Tell me honest truth—you're not joking? Is it really true, about the mutiny and the crew of choice brutes?"

"Miss Baldwin," I stammered. "Do you mean to say that you're pleased to hear this? That you'd wish to stay on board if I assured you that we are practically in the hands of a crew of dangerous men, with no knowing what sort of adventure they may be going on?"

"Would I?" she cried promptly. "Why, it's what I've been longing for all my life."

"You—you have—what?" I stammered.

She smiled mischievously at my astonishment.

"Mr. Pitt, who was it that said, 'most men lead lives of quiet desperation'? No matter. He should have included girls, too. Did you ever think that we, too, sometimes might get tired of the hum drum lives we're born to and long for something wild to flavor our existence?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"Of course, you haven't. Well, possibly I'm different from other girls. I don't know. But I've always felt that if I had to live all my life without one great adventure I—I'd burst."

"The great adventure for a girl," said I severely, "is to love, marry, and ——"

"Ah, yes! But somehow I seem to recall having heard that before."

A sea-gull, following the *Wanderer* in search of galley droppings, swooped past us, struck the crest of a small wave with a splash, and soared upward and away.

"There," she said quietly, "that's what I've longed for; just once, to be absolutely free. Do you understand?"

I shook my head.

"There is nothing of the adventurer in me, Miss Baldwin."

"Then why are you here; why don't you leave the yacht?"

"That's different. I came aboard as part of the expedition. I remain because——"

"Because you are not a quitter." She laughed gaily, then grew serious. "I'm a queer bird, am I not, Mr. Pitt?"

"Well, you have succeeded in startling me. When you came on board I judged you to be the typical young girl of your class who has led so sheltered a life——"

"I have, I have! Oh, so—so sheltered! That's why I'm wild to be something else for once."

"So sheltered a life that you would shrink and flee when you discovered that you were the only woman on board the yacht. And that you would be terror-stricken when I told you the true state of affairs on board."

She nodded with mock contrition.

"I know. That's what I should have done to be proper. But I can't help it, Mr. Pitt. I'm not afraid; I don't want to shrink and flee; and I do look forward to something different with unholy joy. Awful, isn't it? But it's all so thrilling—the wicked crew, the mutiny, and—and Captain Brack."

XVI

CHANLER came up briskly before we had time to speak further. His dullness had given place to animation. It was apparent that he had wasted no time while in his stateroom.

"Let's go aft, Betty," he said. "There's an awning up there, and deck-chairs, and no wind. Come on."

I watched them as they went, he, nervous, with unsteady eyes, she, calm, buoyant, strong. He leaned toward her and talked excitedly, and I saw that she drew a little away from him.

They did not sit down. I saw Chanler urging her, and she shook her head and continued to walk to and fro, Chanler following. He was talking and gesticulating excitedly. She looked at him long and steadily once, then looked away.

As I turned I found myself face to face with Captain Brack. He had come down noiselessly from the bridge and was studying me with that old superior smile on his lips.

"Ah, you idealist, Mr. Pitt!" he said softly.

"Idealist, Captain Brack? Why do you say that?"

"It is in your eyes. It is in the position of your chin; it is all over you. You are uplifted and exalted for the moment. You feel that you really are something; you feel strong, is that not so?"

"Perhaps."

"No, not perhaps, but positively. You feel at this moment that you are a big, strong man; in reality you are—Mr. Gardner Pitt." He chuckled carelessly at the flush that came to my cheek. "I have been watching you for some seconds, Mr. Pitt; I have seen you swell and think you were growing. In your calm reason—for you can reason somewhat, Mr. Pitt—you know that you are not growing; but for the moment you have allowed your emotions to hypnotize you. You are a victim of your own emotions. For instance—" he waved his thick hand toward the aft where Chanler and Miss Baldwin now were promenading together—"you fancy that in Mr. Chanler's partner you have been looking at something wonderful and fine. Is that not so?"

"That is so, captain."

"Something above the common, raw, crawling stuff of life?"

"Decidedly so."

"Something which it is not the sphere of reason to grasp, but which the emotions alone can appreciate?"

"Go on."

He laughed unctuously.

"Then I have diagnosed your delusion accurately."

"Are you sure it is a delusion, captain?"

"Yes. Self-hypnosis. What you see is not there."

Betty turned at this moment so that her face was toward us.

"What do you see back there, Brack?" I asked.

He looked at her steadily; his head was lowered a little, and again there was in his eyes the look comparable to Garvin's when he saw the raw gold.

"I see," said he slowly, without taking his eyes off Betty, "just what there is there; a very fine, healthy young specimen of the female of the species."

His words were like a dull knife on my nerves, but I controlled myself.

"Nothing more? I asked casually.

"No. For there is no more."

I laughed, and I was conscious of a sensation of relief. The man had his limitations then, even though one glance from his eyes had left so strong an impression on Miss Baldwin.

"I feel sorry for you then," said I. "You are to be pitied for your lack of imagination."

He did not take his eyes off Betty.

"No," he said, "for that is enough to see. It is more than enough. A fine young woman. Only once or twice in my life have I seen finer. Too fine to be wasted on a silly ineffectual. Yes, too fine to be won except by a man."

He swung around on me and said with a wink:

"I have a feeling, Mr. Pitt, that an interesting voyage lies before us. And—and a short time ago I didn't think anything could interest me much except gold—which means power."

"Do you feel that we are going to find gold at this alleged gold-field in the alleged hidden country to which we are going?"

"Naturally. Else we would not be found there now."

"Have you any positive reason for believing gold is to be found there? Not that story of the alleged miner," I hastened on. "You don't expect any reasoning being to accept that story as a reason. Have you any real reason for thinking there is gold at this so-called Kalmut Fiord?"

His eyebrows raised a trifle and he smiled as one might at a child who displays unexpected shrewdness.

"You do not have much confidence in the miner's story, Mr. Pitt?" he asked.

"The maundering of a delirious man," I retorted. "Surely you would not change the purpose of this expedition on such slender information as that."

He ceased smiling for a moment.

"I know that there is gold at Kalmut Fiord," he said. "Does that ease you?"

"If I knew how you know there is gold there, I would be more satisfied. And even granting that you know there is gold there—Captain Brack, you will pardon me—but it scarcely seems in keeping with your character to cheerfully sail a ship-load of people to this gold-field, where they will have an equal chance with you to enrich themselves."

"No?" he said, and his smile was back in its place. "You have sounded my character then, have you, Mr. Pitt?"

"My dear captain! I am sure you hardly expect to impress even a casual observer as a man who would freely invite a crowd to share a gold find with him."

He laughed, nodding at me approvingly.

"That isn't bad, Pitt. The sea air sharpens wits. But have you ever been in the North, away from police officers and courts?"

"Never."

"Have you ever been in a spot where laws do not reach?"

"No."

"Well, it is such a place that you are going to now, Pitt. You will find yourself in a new world, in this hidden country, a world as it was in the beginning, with the laws of nature the only ones necessary to consider. In such places gold naturally is attracted to the strongest man, no matter who digs it out of the ground. Gold, do I say? Ha! All things to the strong in this place, Pitt. Nature's law; all things to the strong, and especially—" he looked again toward the after deck— "women."

XVII

MY EXPRESSED faith that Chanler would straighten up now that Miss Baldwin was on board was doomed to early destruction. George had sunk further than his face betrayed, further than any of us had guessed. As a matter of fact this probably was the first time in his life that he had seriously struggled with a big problem, and the struggle had exposed him in a fashion I had not thought possible.

Twice that afternoon he left Miss Baldwin for short runs into his stateroom, and each time he returned vivacious and aggressive. At luncheon he was glum and distrait. Out of regard for Miss Baldwin he had banished liquor from the table and he suffered without it.

Captain Brack was not present at luncheon. He was too occupied between the bridge and the engine-room. Riordan also was absent.

"We are running at our maximum now, yes sir," said Wilson in reply to a question. "The captain is anxious to hold her so, and he is laying the course himself."

"Do you know where we are going, Wilson?" I asked.

"No sir. Our course is due north. We should strike somewhere on the Kenai Peninsula, sir."

"What kind of a country is it there?" asked Betty.

"No country at all, Miss. Entirely unsettled. A rough coast-line."

"Cappy apparently knows where he's going," muttered Chanler.

"Yes sir," said Wilson.

"And nobody else does."

"No sir."

"And that's what I call a situation to keep a chap from being bored. What do you say, Wilson?"

"I'm not easily bored, sir."

"You lucky dog!"

"Yes sir," said Wilson, and excusing himself went out.

When Dr. Olson had done likewise Chanler looked long and lovingly at Miss Baldwin.

"Betty," he said, as if rousing himself with an effort.

"Yes, George."

"Betty, don't you think you were an awful fool to come on a crazy trip like this?"

She smiled as if humoring him.

"Why do you say that, George?"

"Suppose folks should hear about it?"

"What then?"

"Betty—you—all alone on a yacht with me. What'll folks think if they know?"

"They do know," she said. "I told my folks and friends where I was going."

"Yes, but you told them my sister was on board."

"Certainly—as you told me."

"Oh, don't rub it in, Betty. That's past. But what do you think people will think when they know she wasn't on board, and that you came 'way up here alone to join me?"

She looked at him steadily. I half rose to leave, but a glance from her eyes told me to remain. It was not a pleasant scene. I stared at my napkin.

"You see, Betty," he continued, leaning loosely across the table, "that's what it will look like. Won't it, Gardy?"

I did not reply.

"What will it look like, George?" she asked evenly.

"Like you were chasing me."

She laughed, and her laughter was like a song-burst of wholesome young life in the atmosphere of Chanler's drink-drugged maundering.

"Well, George, isn't that what I am doing?"

"People will talk, Betty," he persisted. "It's a bad situation—for you. I—I'm sorry I got you to come here—no, hang it! I'm not. But I am worrying about your reputation, Betty."

"I think I can take care of my reputation, George," she said quietly.

"Let me take care of it, Betty!" he cried hoarsely, taking her hand.

"Please, George," she said, smiling, as she rose.

"Betty!" He clung to her hand.

With swift, confident strength she drew her hand free, lifting him slightly from his chair in doing so.

"You'll excuse me now, won't you?" she said, and went to her room.

Chanler flung himself back in his chair, laughing harshly.

"Did you see that — did you see it, Gardy?" he said, as he pressed the bell. "She doesn't care if I do own this yacht. I'm nothing to her. Oh, what a rotten trip this is going to be!"

"Chanler," I said, "sit still for a minute and listen. You have got to pull yourself together. You have got to straighten out this mess. You have got to show Miss Baldwin that you are the man she is hoping to find in you. Buck up, man! Her hopes are pinned on you. She cares. Do you think she would have come this far if she didn't care? She has done her share; she's here. Now, for her sake, do your share. Pull yourself together and be the man she has been hoping all this time she would find you."

"Hooray!" he whispered mockingly. "Go on, Gardy; you're the boy who can say things. King's peg," he said to the steward who had come in.

"Wait!" I said. The man stopped. "Chanler, you've been overdoing it. You're not yourself. You've done things that aren't done; you've got to sober up and straighten them out."

"Got to!"

"Yes; as a gentleman you've got to. Miss Baldwin's happiness — perhaps her whole life's happiness—depends on your being a gentleman from now on. For God's sake man! Isn't it worth sobering up to win a prize like that?"

"Oh, leave me alone, Gardy," he growled. "Don't you think I know what I'm doing? It doesn't make any difference what I do now. I've lost her. She wouldn't have me no matter what I did now. I know it. Knew it five minutes after she came on board. Saw it in her eyes. Felt it. My hold on her's slipped—just like that. Gone —forever. No use trying. King's peg," he repeated, "and hurry."

I sat silent, rage and disgust choking me, while the man brought in that terrible mixture of champagne and brandy in equal parts. Chanler drank it in gulps.

"Have some, Gardy? No? That's right. Some men shouldn't touch rum; you're one of them. 'Cause why? 'Cause you've got a conscience. Rot, rot, rot! Got to straighten up, have I, Gardy? 'Got to' are words that weren't made for me, my boy."

"For God's sake! Chanler, drop that sort of talk!" I cried, springing to my feet. "If you knew what a sickening parody you are on the gentleman you were at home, you wouldn't put on airs."

"Not to me, Gardy, not to me can you utter such contemptuous words," he said harshly.

"You be ——, you and your big talk!" I exploded. "Do you think you're entitled to any respect? Do you think I or any one else on board cares who you are at present? Do you think your money is still a power? Well, it's not. It ceased to be this morning. Brack and the crew—Brack especially—there's the power aboard this yacht. And you're disgracing yourself and your class before them all.

"First you lie by wireless to get Miss Baldwin on board, and now you're taking the easiest way, keeping drunk, because you're not man enough to face the situation sober—not man enough to make things right for the girl who came here trustfully depending on you. Think of it, Chanler; think who you are—of your family. Have one more try at decency, at least. Chuck away that poison in your hand and let me call Dr. Olson and get you straightened up."

He raised the large glass to his lips and drank the peg down without a falter.

"Gardy," he said, setting the glass down, "you're fired."

I laughed.

"I like you, Gardy; you're a dear old fellow," he continued, "but you mustn't presume on our friendship and talk to me like that. I've got to let you out."

"And I suppose I'm to pack my things and go?" said I. "Oh, come, Chanler; wake up. Try to see things with sane eyes. I don't care whether I'm fired or whether we remain friends. We're all on the same plane for the present; you, Miss Baldwin, myself, we're in the hands of Captain Brack and the crew."

He shuddered nervously.

"Don't say such things, Gardy; I forbid them in my hearing."

"You're afraid to hear them, you mean."

"Afraid or not, it makes no difference. They annoy me and I won't be annoyed. I won't, you hear. Been annoyed enough on this trip. Here I was waiting for Betty's coming. Felt sure she'd have me if I got her away alone, just herself and me. She comes, looks around. I look in her eyes and bang! I see she won't have me. Plain as print. Whole trip useless. It's a rotten world!"

"You're giving up without a struggle, Chanler?"

"No use, my boy. I don't like struggling, anyhow."

"But, Miss Baldwin is, at least your guest, on board your yacht. The yacht is in the hands of Brack and the crew. Haven't you thought that this situation might develop into one that may be unpleasant and even unsafe for Miss Baldwin?"

"I have," he said, signaling for another peg. "And I wish I was back home in the big leather chair at the club, looking out on Fifth Avenue." He waved his hand drunkenly toward me. "I entrust—entrust Miss Beatrice Baldwin—safety, pleasure, honor, rep'tation to you, Gardy. Ha! There's a bright little idea. I hire you again, Gardy. New job. You—you see Betty safe and sound back to her folks."

That hour marked the beginning of Chanler's eclipse. At dinner-time Simmons reported him indisposed. During the next three days he left his room but seldom. He had but one desire now: to eliminate himself as a responsible factor in the storm of events about to break upon the *Wanderer* and its people.

XVIII

CAPTAIN BRACK was sitting in Chanler's chair when we went in to dinner that evening and Miss Baldwin's place was beside him. Dr. Olson and myself—neither Riordan nor Wilson had appeared—sat opposite.

Brack was dressed with the care of a captain of a popular trans-Atlantic liner, and his attitude toward Miss Baldwin was solely that of a captain solicitous for his passenger's comfort and pleasure. The yacht might have been the *Mauretania*, our little party the dinner crowd of the liner's first saloon. Brack's personality, polished and radiant for the time being, his flashing conversation, filled and illumined the room. It was difficult not to forget young Larson as one sat beneath his spell.

"An apology is necessary, Miss Baldwin, for my absence from luncheon," he said. "It is not etiquette to fail to welcome a passenger to her first meal on board. It was necessary, however, that I stay on the bridge until I was sure that the *Wanderer* had reached her limit of speed and that we were holding true on our course. I have stolen thirty minutes from that duty this evening to fulfil my social obligation as captain."

"Then we are in a hurry, Captain Brack?" she asked.

His eyes were upon her—those eyes with their compelling power—and her manner was subdued.

"The crew is in a desperate hurry, Miss Bakdwin," he said with one of his flashing smiles. "Men are always in a hurry when they hear of gold. And, really—" he bowed to her deferentially—"we have much to thank you for, Miss Baldwin, for relieving a tense situation this morning. I do not mean that there was the slightest danger of any trouble. No, no! But the situation was a trifle uncomfortable when you appeared and voted that we go hunting for gold instead of bones." He laughed softly. "I have wondered why you did that, Miss Baldwin; is it presumptuous to ask?"

Miss Baldwin toyed with her spoon.

"I thought that this—going gold-hunting—was so much more alive."

"Good!" he said earnestly. "That is why I voted for it, too. To be alive while we are living—that is more important than to unearth old skeletons. Isn't that your idea, Miss Baldwin?"

"Yes," she said with a strange smile.

"And to be alive means to live in the open, free and untrapped."

She looked up at him, and by her expression I knew that she saw only his eyes.

"You don't look as if you would be contented indoors, captain," she said with a little laugh.

"Are you?" he said, and looked straight at her.

She smiled in puzzled fashion without replying.

"No, you are not," he answered for her. "For you are very, very much alive, and so must naturally have longings for the free life, which means life outdoors. Am I not right?"

"Yes."

"Life—we can make it a free, glorious thing, or a gray, trapped affair, just as we choose. It is all a matter of courage. There is still much room in the world. It is not crowded except in spots. If we choose to remain in one of those crowded spots, or rather, if we are afraid to leave them, we must, of necessity, become one of the gray, trapped crowd, existing through a certain span of years without ever knowing what it is to be truly alive. But in the great open spaces people live—they are alive. They are natural, they are hand-in-hand with Nature, and Nature gives them more reward for living than does what man calls civilization.

"As one who has lived under both conditions, Miss Baldwin, I assure you that it is only in the uncrowded spaces that man may get close enough to the root of Life to experience the sensation of immortality. Haven't you felt something like that yourself?"

"Yes," she said again, and her eyes were puzzled and full of wonder.

"You will learn," he said, nodding his head gravely. "You are one of those who will learn quickly the message that the open has for you. You are free-born. You would not be here unless the call to freedom had come to you. Isn't that so?"

"I—I have always longed for an experience like this. How did you know?"

"It is written upon you as plain as print; you are finding your true sphere. Tell me truthfully: do you not at this moment feel stirred as you never did before in your life?"

She looked up at him quickly; it seemed as if he had frightened her.

"How could you know that?" she faltered.

He smiled, leaning toward her, his eyes holding hers.

"That and many more things you will learn, Miss Baldwin," he said impressively. "You are beginning a new life. The new impulses you feel are the commands of your true spirit, stricken free of the bonds of civilization. Obey them. Remember, they are your true self; there can be for you no realization of the full possibilities of life save along the way they lead you. There is hidden country in all of us, and until we explore it we don't know what it is to live."

He sat back in his chair, smiling, satisfied.

"And now you must excuse me; my thirty minutes are up and I have promised Riordan thirty minutes to dine." As he bowed and rose his glance went across the table to me. "Now, Mr. Pitt, I will wager, never has felt a call to be free—to explore any hidden country."

I did not reply.

"No, Mr. Pitt is not one of us. But, Miss Baldwin," he concluded, bending over her as he passed out, "you are. Your true life is about to begin."

And she followed him with her eyes as he left the room, though there was that in her expression which suggested that she did so unwillingly.

"Ah!"

The faintest exclamation of relief escaped her lips as the captain disappeared. She sank back in her chair as if suddenly released. She looked around; our eyes met. She excused herself in a dazed sort of fashion and went to her room.

HOURS afterward I was pacing the deck. It was another pitch-dark night, and to one fresh from the glare of New York, the darkness was wellnigh appalling. The *Wanderer's* searchlight seemed only a thin knife-gash, parting the darkness before us. On either side of its beam the blackness of night stood like a wall. There were no stars to be seen above. East, north, south and west, naught but the dead night; below, only the hiss of unseen waters through which we were rushing toward—what?

I shuffled to and fro on the deck, caring neither where nor how I was going. The scene between Brack and Miss Baldwin at the dinner-table repeated itself again and again, each time with a new, sinister significance. I know what power lay within Brack's eyes. Had they not roused me and thrilled me and made me fighting mad, which was exactly what Brack, in idle sport wished to do? What would be the effect of his will, gleaming through his glances, on a woman, on a young, inexperienced girl like Miss Baldwin? For after all, she was nothing but an inexperienced girl. Yes, I told myself, she was so inexperienced, so ignorant, through the sheltered life she had lived, that she did not know enough to recognize a distressing situation when she met it. She was brave because she didn't have sense enough to be cautious.

"Mr. Pitt," called a voice softly, "is that you?"

I swung around. I was near a cabin porthole and by its light I made out Miss Baldwin coming toward me.

"I'm glad," she said. "Don't stop, please; let us walk.

"I came out," she continued, as we fell into step, "because I didn't like to be alone."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I seemed lonesome. It was nice to come out here and find you."

I made no response, and our walk was silent for a long time.

"I wanted to speak to you about something," she said at last, "about Captain Brack."

"Yes?"

She hesitated.

"Is—is he as wonderful as he seems?"

"Captain Brack is a remarkable man," I replied.

"I thought he was wonderful when he was speaking," she said falteringly. "But when he was gone I—it seemed different."

"How different?"

"I don't know just. I loved to listen while he was talking. But after he'd gone I felt relieved. It frightened me a little. That's why I came out. What do you know about him?"

I was at loss for a reply. To tell her what I knew of Brack, of my first sight of him in the Seattle saloon, of what I had learned aboard the *Wanderer*, would serve to alarm her in an uncomfortable manner.

"Chanler selected him as his captain," I said.

She gave an impatient toss to her shoulders as we walked on.

"Oh, that doesn't mean anything. What sort of a man is he?"

"Very strong."

"I know that."

"Very capable."

"Yes."

"And entirely unscrupulous."

She nodded her head, not in the least surprised.

"I thought so," she said.

There was a moment of silence. We heard the murmur of waters against our bows.

"He's something like that," she said, pointing out over the dark sea. "A blind, remorseless force; isn't he?"

"But more subtle."

"Oh! Is he?"

"As subtle as he is strong."

She gave a little gasp, as if she had caught herself in an error.

"I didn't know that. I didn't realize—I must be going in. You'll excuse me. Good night, Mr. Pitt. Pleasant dreams."

Pleasant dreams! It was past one in the morning before I ceased my troubled pacing of the *Wanderer's* promenade, and such sleep as weariness finally brought to me was beset by a jumble of nightmares, dominated by Brack's eyes and smile.

XIX

AFTER breakfast next morning I went to see Chanler. He was sitting up in bed, and he had changed greatly overnight. His face was puffed and gray-looking, and the swollen eyelids were parted only enough to disclose a slit of blood-shot eyes. Dr. Olson was with him, whisky-glass in hand, but he was watching Chanler shrewdly.

"I've got him filled up with bromides," whispered the doctor to me. "If we can't get him to sleep he'll have the D. T.'s."

Chanler slowly turned his head toward me and endeavored to open his eyes wide. The effort was too much for him and his face became distorted with a drunken smile.

"There he is—li'l Gardy, the foe of rum," he murmured sleepily. "Model young man. Gardy, know wha' I'd like see? Like see you stewed to zenith. Like see you spiff-iflicated. Oh, wha' 'n ez'bition you'd be! Horr'ble, horr'ble!" He shook his head slowly. "Nay, nay! Don' catch Gardy spiff-iflicated. Don' catch Gardy putting things in's brain to steal his mouth away, do they, Gard'? Noshirr-rr! Noshir-r! Let George do 't, eh, Gardy? Let George—let——"

His head fell forward. With an effort he raised it, but his eyes were closed.

"Gardy—you—you——"

He collapsed slowly upon the pillow and was sound asleep.

Dr. Olson set his glass down and wiped his forehead.

"That's good," he said. "But he's going to be a very sick man."

"Of course," I said. "But now that you have got him asleep we are going to stop his drinking and get him straightened up."

The doctor looked at Chanler's puffed face.

"What's the use?" he said with a shrug of his thin shoulders. "Besides, he doesn't want to do anything of the sort."

"What he wants doesn't matter," I insisted. "He's got to be straightened up. What can you do for him?"

The little man looked at me with a weary smile.

"Why this eagerness, Pitt? If I put Chanler on his feet——"

"Then that's settled," I interrupted. "You admit you can put him on his feet, therefore you've got to do it. Your word?"

"My word," he said solemnly, and went to work.

Miss Baldwin was waiting for me as I came from Chanler's stateroom.

"I saw you just as you went in," she said. "Well?"

"He's sleeping now," I replied. "He'll be all right—or, at least better—when he wakes. George will straighten up."

She looked at me in that wonderful quiet way of hers.

"Are you so loyal to all your friends, Mr. Pitt?" she said.

"George will straighten up," I repeated. "He is in Dr. Olson's hands. He will make amends when he is himself again."

She turned away, a wistful—perhaps bitter—smile faintly touching her lips.

"Miss Baldwin!" I cried apologetically. "Have I said anything to hurt you, to give you pain?"

"You?" she said, smiling brightly. "Of course you haven't. How could you think that? I—I merely happened to think of how different George was a few months ago. No, no! Don't grow sad out of sympathy, please, Mr. Pitt. I'm not unhappy. Do I look it? I cared for George. I know it now. Maybe I could have learned to care for him deeply if he had cared for me truly. But he didn't, and I'm glad I found it out."

"You mustn't say that, Miss Baldwin. You must give him another chance when he's himself again."

"Loyal Mr. Pitt!" she laughed. "Well, I can scarcely help giving George another chance, can I? Here on the same yacht with him. Mr. Pitt, I'll bet I know what you think of me?"

"And that is?"

"That I'm an awful fool to be here?"

I smiled.

"I knew it!" she cried.

"You're wrong!" I protested. "I do not think so at this moment."

"But you have thought so?"

"I have thought you—well, not quite as cautious——"

"Prevaricator! You've thought: 'What sort of a silly madcap is this girl!' I know it. Well, I guess you're right. It was a foolish thing to do; it's foolish to be glad at the prospect of adventure. Other girls wouldn't do it. They wouldn't think of it. They'd think a girl queer who did. That proves it's foolish, doesn't it? It isn't done. I can't help it, though; I've needed something like this."

"It is the day of restlessness among American women," I said fatuously.

"Restlessness? Is it? Yes, I suppose it is. But my restlessness doesn't take the regular, honest truth road, you know. Lots of my girl friends have felt they wanted to do something, but they've wanted to go suff'ing, or paint, or write, or teach folk-dances, or something like that. I didn't, not any more than I wanted to be considered a doll in pretty clothes all my life.

"I wanted to break away. Well, I did. Here I am. And, scandalous as it may sound, I'm enjoying every minute. Now, Mr. Pitt, there's my whole confession. I have acted foolishly, and I know it, but really, I feel as if I had broken loose from something that had held me down. I feel as if it was the beginning of a new life for me—of my real life."

"A new life?" I said. "Why, that's what Captain Brack said last night."

She looked away.

"Yes, so he did," she said slowly.

And I thought she shivered a little.

I AM afraid I cursed poor George Chanler in unchristian fashion during the rest of that run up to Kalmut Fiord. For during those days Captain Brack wooed Miss Baldwin steadily. At each meal he sat at her side; his eyes were upon her, his magic words were for her alone. And even while he spoke to her I saw in his eyes that terrible, ruthless look I knew so well.

"What does the hidden country of Kalmut Fiord hold?" he speculated one evening. "Ah, Miss Baldwin, if we knew our interest would be discounted. It is a primitive spot, surely; a primal piece of earth. Let us pray that it holds Romance, without which there can be no beginning of a new life." Once more he repeated: "Hidden country! There's some in all of us, and until we explore it we don't live."

The effect of his efforts was apparent upon Miss Baldwin. She seemed to dread each meeting with him, yet she sat beneath his spell in a state of fascination. So I cursed poor Chanler. Had he been the man Miss Baldwin had hoped she would have had no attention for Brack.

Near dusk on the third day after changing our course we sighted land over our bows, a tiny gray smudge on the horizon. Our speed was cut down to a crawl at once. The captain, after studying the land through his glasses, ordered our course changed to west by nor'west, and through the thickening darkness we moved at a foot-pace, gradually drawing nearer a harboring, fir-lined coast line.

That night, while most of us slept soundly, we slipped into Kalmut Fiord. The cessation of the yacht's motion aroused me in the morning, and half awake I dressed and stumbled out on deck to learn the cause.

In the darkness I had a jumbled impression that the *Wanderer* was lying in a small lake surrounded by a circle of small, craggy mountains. Then, my senses clearing, I realized that I had stepped into the midst of events of sinister portent.

XX

IT WAS still too dark to gather an accurate impression of the yacht's surroundings, yet light enough to make out what was going on directly before me. A number of sailors were dropping two of the port life-boats into the water. They worked eagerly and cautiously, like men in haste and with a desire for silence. A block, carelessly handled, swung with a clang against one of the davits and a subdued voice cursed the guilty man for his clumsiness.

"Don't do that again." Through the darkness and morning fog the whisper sounded like a threat of murder. "Now over with those sea-ladders."

The voice was Brack's.

"All right here Foxy," said another low voice as the second boat was dropped with little noise into the water. "Let 'em come."

This was a new voice to me. It was not Riordan's nor Garvin's, nor Wilson's, yet it had in it a note of authority which did not belong to any of the sailors. I was further puzzled because I seemed to have heard it somewhere before.

"Bring them up, Garvin. Hurry; we've got to be up there before it's light."

Brack was speaking again in a loud whisper. Garvin's great bulk slipped past me toward the after deck, his feet shuffling along the deck to make as little noise as possible. He was breathing swiftly and heavily as a man breathes under the stress of great excitement.

I now saw that the captain was standing at one of the sea-ladders and at the other was a man whose figure I did not recognize as belonging to any of the men on board. It was a spare, wiry figure, with a poise that belonged to no ordinary sailor. I moved a little closer. Now I saw that the man carried a rifle in the hollow of his arm. I looked at Brack; he was armed likewise.

That movement proved my undoing.

"Who the devil's that?" demanded the wiry man hoarsely.

Brack leaned forward and looked at me steadily for several seconds.

"Don't you sleep soundly, Pitt?" he asked.

"Not very," I replied.

He continued to look at me steadfastly. Presently he began to grin.

"That is unfortunate for you," he said at last.

"Surely not," said I. "Had I been sleeping soundly this morning I would have missed the sight of all this mysterious preparation."

He chuckled ominously.

"Had you been sleeping soundly—" he began and stopped. "All right, men. Hurry."

A file of men came slipping up from aft. They moved with their bodies crouched far over and stepped softly. I heard their excited breathing as they drew near. And each of them bore in his hands a rifle.

"Four in this boat; four in the other," commanded Brack. "Get down there without any noise."

Garvin started to tumble over the side with the rest of the men; but Brack stopped him. They whispered together, and Garvin again went aft.

The men were all in the boats now and Brack and the new man stood at the ladders waiting to follow. The new man had his back toward me. He was speaking to the captain.

"Who the devil is this guy, Foxy?" he whispered. "I thought we were going to make a clean getaway."

"Pitt," said Brack, "step up and meet the gold-finder, the man whose story you didn't think a good excuse for coming here."

I stood where I was, but the man turned and took a step forward to have a better look at me, and then I knew why his voice had puzzled me. The man was Madigan, whom I had seen quarreling with Brack back in Billy Taylor's saloon in Seattle.

Perhaps some instinct had warned me to be prepared for a shock, for I looked Madigan over without betraying the rush of thoughts with which my mind was seething. In a flash the whole of Brack's scheming, from the time he had met Chanler in San Francisco to the present moment, was made plain. He had influenced Chanler to purchase the *Wanderer* and go north; he had engaged Madigan to hide away on board and play the wrecked miner at the proper moment; he had brought the *Wanderer* into the bay at night; and he was now starting out—for what?

I managed to smile as I glanced significantly at the rifles which both men carried.

"And are you going gold-digging now, Captain Brack?" said I. "I thought picks and shovels were the proper utensils for mining."

"Much easier to let others use them," said he. "Much more satisfactory to use this—" he patted his rifle—"after others have used the picks and shovels. As you soon shall see, Mr. Pitt."

"I——"

He lifted his right hand as if for a signal. Quicker than any normal thought of mine, instinct whispered the imminence of danger.

I ducked and crouched low before Brack's signal was completed, and a fist grazed the top of my head from behind and a hand—Garvin's—caught hold of my left arm. Terror drove me to action.

As instinctively as any attacked animal whirls upon its assailant, I turned on Garvin, sweeping my arms around wildly. He had expected no resistance, and one of my fists thudded viciously into the middle of his throat. He gurgled in strange fashion, throwing his head far back, and I struck him again, struck with a strength which I had not dreamed that I possessed. I saw him staggering, and turned to run.

Madigan leaped nimbly to block me. I dodged back, but the captain was there, so I turned to Madigan. He was on me with a rush; we clinched, struggled, fell, and got up again. This continued for some time. Then a great weight seemed to drop on the back of my head and my knowledge of what was happening ceased suddenly.

XXI

MY NEXT moment of consciousness consisted of a sensation of helplessness. I was awake; I heard sounds vaguely; but I could not see, nor could I move.

"There." A voice seemed to speak from a far-away darkness. "He's coming to; you didn't kill him after all, cap."

I felt something strike me heavily in the side.

"Yes. He's coming to. Prod him again. —— him! He delayed us, and every minute counts."

Once more the heavy blow fell on my side. I opened my eyes wearily. Painfully turning my head I looked toward my side and made out a heay boot. Some one had been kicking me. My eyes moved up the boot; Garvin was its owner. The sight of his gross face brought back memory and consciousness. There was blood on his mouth; in the lower lip was a long cut, and I was glad.

Garvin was staring at me with a mingling of curiosity and respect in his expression.

"Where the —— did you learn that punch in the Adam's apple?" he said. "That's a new one to me. And, say, you're quick; quickest man I ever see; and you're all there for a middle-weight, bo."

"Who hit me in the back of the head?" I demanded weakly. "That was a cowardly blow."

I heard a growl somewhere which I recognized as Brack's.

"We were in a hurry," he said, "and you would not give us a chance to handle you gently. You delayed us. That may be serious."

I strove to rise and struck my chest against a board. I was conscious of a rhythmic motion, and a dull, squeaky sound, repeated without cessation. My senses cleared. I turned my head. I was lying under a seat in one of the life-boats and the boat was being rushed onward under the impulse of eagerly pulled oars.

"What's this?" I groaned. "What sort of an outrage is this?"

I twisted myself from under the seat and sat up, looking around for the yacht. There was no sight of it. There was no sight of anything but water and steep hills, and the second life-boat closely following us. We were pulling up a narrow, winding bay. Its width was fairly uniform, probably a hundred yards. Its water was pure blue. And on both sides, and before and behind us, rose the craggy, fir-clad hills, approaching the size of mountains, shutting us out from all the rest of the world.

"Sit down, Mr. Pitt; it is more comfortable." From the bow Brack spoke, and I turned upon him.

"What do you mean?" I began, and there I stopped.

For, though Brack spoke in laughing fashion, there was no laughter about his lips, none in his eyes. His face was set like a bronze mask, his mouth was scarcely visible, his eyes shone hard and fiery between slitted lids. Brack had ceased to pretend; the brute in him was having its way, and he didn't care who saw it.

"You would better have slept soundly this morning, Mr. Pitt," he said. "If your foolish fight delayed us too long—you will soon know why."

"I want to know why right now!" I cried, in spite of the terror that his face inspired. "You've assaulted me; you've taken me off the yacht by force. You'll pay for this when we get back home."

"Suppose," said he musingly, "suppose you should never get back home?"

His tone, not his words, froze me. I could not speak. I looked at the faces of the men who were rowing furiously, at Garvin. And I looked at the cold blue water through which we were speeding and knew it was no more remorseless than the men in that boat.

"Don't you think now it would have been better for you to have slept?" said Brack.

"I think," I retorted hotly as the power of speech came rushing back to me, "that you had better take me back to the yacht; and I know that I will see you punished for assault for this."

A sound like laughter issued from his throat, but his expression did not change.

"Assault?" he repeated. "Ha! You forget that you are out of the land of courts now, Pity. Assault! Ha! Why, Pitt, that will be like a maiden's kiss compared to what's going to happen in the next half hour. Sit down; you're in that oar's way. Put him down, Garvin."

Garvin obediently kicked me back of the knee-joints and I dropped with a noisy clatter to the bottom of the boat.

"—— you!" swore Brack in a loud whisper. "If you make another noise like that I'll have you dumped overboard. You've made us late. Now just you lay still and nice where you are, Pitt; we're having no noise on this excursion."

I sat silent. I was half dazed from the blow on the head and by my situation, and for the next few minutes I observed what was taking place as one who is less than half awake. By this time we had come to the head of the bay and were entering the mouth of a small river which rambled crookedly down through a gap in the hills.

"More juice in your strokes, men," whispered Brack. "It's a strong current, and we haven't much farther to go."

His words stimulated the men. Their fierce eyes grew fiercer, and they bent to their oars with all their might. Most of them were panting from excitement and exertion.

"We'll land here," said Brack presently. "No noise, men."

The boats swung in to the bank indicated and the men tumbled out, clutching their rifles eagerly.

"Come along, Pitt."

"No," I responded. "From what I hear you're bound for some sort of a crime."

"So are you. That's why I took you along—to make you pay for sleeping so lightly. Get out."

Two men sprang into the boat toward me, and I was forced to obey. With Brack in the lead a single file was formed and I started up a faintly marked footpath which ran along the stream. I was placed near the middle of the line; Madigan brought up the rear. I was the only man in the party who was not armed.

For the next ten minutes we hurried forward, through brush, over rocks and fallen logs, and through muddy spring-holes without a word being spoken. Brack in the lead, seemed to take no notice of the obstacles that presented themselves, and every man in the line with the exception of myself seemed imbued by the same fierce eagerness. I was helpless. The man behind me was continually treading on my heels, his heavy breath was on my neck, and I, too, was forced to hurry, driven along, moving as in a cruel nightmare.

Brack stopped suddenly and held up his hand. A sound had broken the silence ahead of us. It was repeated, a dull, slapping sound, and Brack whispered an oath.

"They're up; chopping wood for breakfast. Follow me."

He struck off into a wooded ravine at right angles to the trail. At a distance which I estimated to be three city blocks from the river he led the way by zigzags up a series of hills and presently we were nearing the crest of a ridge beyond which no further hills were visible.

"Get down now," he ordered. "The lake's in the valley over this hill. The man who shows himself above the brush or makes a noise'll get hurt."

He began to wriggle himself forward through the stunted trees until at last he was able to peer over the crest of the ridge, and the rest followed his example.

A small, blackish lake lay in the marshy valley below. On the shore opposite to us were two log cabins, several huge piles of dirt, and a crude derrick. Daylight was streaming into the valley, dispersing the night fogs, and we made out two men moving about the buildings. Brack swore much but softly.

"Slade and Harris!" He paused to curse again. "—— 'em! We're too late. —— you, Pitt, you'll pay for this."

"What the ——!" snarled Madigan as the captain hesitated. "What's all this foxy work for, Foxy? They're two and we're ten. Why don't we go down an' clean 'em up?"

"Easy—easy, Tad," said Brack softly. "No noise. Slade and Harris are too good with the rifle to try any straight rushing. Besides, there's a back trail over there, and they might get away. They've got the gold cached some place and we may need 'em alive to learn where it is. A little hanging up by the thumbs will make 'em tell. Gad! The fools! They've got three dumps; that means three shafts. The thing's richer than I thought, and they've kept it all right down there because they swore to stay there till they had a hundred thousand apiece."

"Gawd!" whispered Garvin. "Let's take a chance, cap."

"Easy, Garvin, easy!" chuckled Brack. "They're a couple of suckers, but they can shoot.

"Well," growled Madigan, "let's have it —when do we go get 'em?"

Brack studied the scene before him for several minutes before replying.

"We've got to wait until they're in the shafts," was his decision. "This is too big a risk, giving 'em a chance. If we jump 'em now from this side they'll put up a stiff fight and at the same time have a chance of getting away over their back trail. And if they get into the woods, they won't leave the gold where we can find it easily. We've got to spoil that back trail for 'em."

"Yep;" said Garvin, "leave 'em no get-away."

"Madigan," said Brack, "You take your men and circle around on this side of the ridge and go north until you strike their trail running out of the valley."

"That'll take a couple of hours."

"A little longer, probably. When you're set, fire three shots and we'll start to rush 'em from this side. The rest'll be easy. Boys, by ten o'clock we'll all be rich."

We fell back from the top of the ridge, and in a ravine well out of sight Madigan led his four men into the forest. Brack waited until they were out of sight and then hurried us back to the boats. Pulling Madigan's boat behind us we were swiftly rowed down the river into the bay. Here the empty boat was tied up in a well-hidden nook, and we went on toward the yacht.

I now had an opportunity to note the distance which we had traveled. The fiord curved raggedly from the river's mouth toward the sea. In spite of the foothills which shut us in I saw that our course at first took us away from the river and the lake. Then, where the bay began to widen, we began to curve backward until when, at last the *Wanderer*, riding serene and white on her cradle of blue water, appeared before us, I knew that our course had been such that the distance overland to the miner's lake could not be much more than half of what it was by water. I judged the distance down the bay from the river-mouth to the *Wanderer* to be about three miles.

As we made out the yacht in the distance, the Captain looked at his watch.

"Back in nice time for breakfast," he said. "Well, Pitt, how does it feel to belong to a gang of robbers? Please don't say you don't belong. You do, you know; we've elected you. Yes; you're one of us now, and we're going to keep close watch on you until this little job is over."

"What is your object?" I asked. "Why did you drag me up there with you?"

"Because I suspect that you like to talk, Pitt," said he, as he suddenly changed the course of the boat. "You were unfortunate enough to see us leaving ship. Had I permitted you to stay on board you would have talked. You might have talked in alarming fashion, and I do not wish Miss Baldwin to be alarmed—until our work here is done, at least."

"Then why did you bring me back?" I cried. "For you certainly can not expect me to keep silent after what I have seen and heard."

"You can talk all you want to now, Pitt," he laughed. Then I saw that the boat was pointing toward the shore. "Talk your head off, Pitt. Because no matter how loud you talk your voice won't be among those heard aboard."

The boat shot into a tiny indentation of the fiord, from which the *Wanderer* could not be seen, and grounded on the gravelly beach.

"Will you get out sensibly, Pitt, or will you have to be knocked down and dragged out?" said Brack carelessly.

I stepped out.

"Barry, you stay here with him."

A vicious-looking seaman of medium height followed me onto the beach, his rifle under his arm.

"We'll be back in an hour or so," continued Brack as the boat backed away. "Must look after our passenger, you know. And be nice, Pitt, and you won't get hurt."

"Yes, and make it —— nice, too!" growled the man Barry, scowling at me. "'Cause I don't half like this job an' I sort o' figger the cap' wouldn't be sore if he come back and found I'd had to put you out of business."

XXII

I STOOD with my head up until the boat had whisked Brack out of sight, then slumped down in despair upon a convenient boulder. I was horrified and frightened. My thoughts had cleared by now and the full significance of what I had seen, heard, and undergone came to me. Brutal robbery, probably murder; such was the sum and substance of Brack's plans The expedition and the *Wanderer* turned in the tools of a piracy which would have been unbelievable with any other man than the captain! And Miss Baldwin back there on the yacht, ignorant of the morning's happenings, unsuspecting of Brack's true character, and I helpless to warn her or be of any assistance.

Brack would keep up the pretense. He would be the smooth-talking captain this morning as if nothing untoward had happened, or was going to happen. He would maintain this pose until he had accomplished the robbery, until it pleased him to drop it. And after this morning I knew that he would go to any lengths to fulfil his will.

"Cold?" sneered Barry as I shivered. "Well, don't worry, sissy, Cap'll make it warm enough for you when he gets ready to 'tend to you."

I turned to plead with him, and he laughed delightedly at the fear and wretchedness in my face. For I was afraid. This was no place for me. It was all too strange, too harsh. I was literally sick at my stomach; and yet I knew all the time that I was going to try to warn those unsuspecting miners whom Captain Brack planned to catch in their mine like rats in a pit. Heaven knows

I did not wish to do it! In my heart I protested against the Fate that had placed such a task to my lot. I was unfit for it. Somebody else, more used to such things, should have had the job.

I would have pleaded with Barry, have sought to bribe him, but the expression on his vicious countenance made me hold my tongue. What could I do? This sort of thing was new to me; how did one go about it?

I thought of the two miners delving away in their shafts, of them suddenly looking up to find Brack grinning down at them. The unfairness of the thing was revolting. Did men do such things to their fellows in this day and age?

I glanced at Barry and his rifle and knew that they did. Craft and brutality, those were the laws governing this situation. And craft and brutality soon began to enter my thoughts as readily as they might enter those of Brack, Garvin, or the lout who was guarding me.

At my feet lay several stones the size of a man's fist. Presently I feigned sleepiness, nodded, and slipped from the boulder to a seat on the sand.

"Sleepy, eh?" Barry sneered. "You're a fine piece o' cheese."

"I'm sick," I muttered. "My head aches."

"Oh, you poor thing!" He prodded me carelessly with the butt of his rifle. "For two cents I'd give you a clout that'd take the ache out of that head for good."

The minutes went by in silence. Half an hour later, perhaps, I saw Barry's vigilance begin to relax.

My right hand dropped languidly at my side and found a round stone, slightly larger than a baseball. Barry did not see.

More time passed. At last Barry, catching himself nodding, straightened up and again prodded me with the butt.

"Don't do that again," I whined. "Please don't."

"'Please don't!'" mocked Barry.

In his estimation I was such a weakling that he had no need to be cautious. The rifle-butt again touched my side. I grasped it suddenly with my left hand, the fingers fastening themselves around the trigger-guard, and sprang up, the stone in my right hand. Barry jerked at the rifle, drawing me close, and I felled him to the ground with a blow from the stone on the temple.

I had the rifle now, and as he strove to rise I struck him on the head with the heavy barrel and he lay still. I stood over him, ready to strike again, but he did not move and with the rifle in my hand I ran through the green-leaved brush which fringed the fiord and started to climb the rocky hills that walled it in.

What I had to do I knew must be done in a hurry, before Brack or Madigan were in a position to keep a watch on the lake, and I ran on, regardless of the fissures and gaps with which the hill was pitted. In my haste I paid little attention to my path, and near the top I plunged suddenly through a tangle of brush and fell into what proved to be the mouth of a cave-like opening in the rocky portion of the hill.

The cave was so well hidden by the spring foliage that I had literally to walk into it before suspecting its existence. I hid the rifle there, clambered out and went on. If my senses of direction and distance were right the lake should be straight north and about a mile and a half away.

Though I ran and walked as rapidly as possible, it was half an hour before I struck the ridge which shut out the lake from sight of the bay. Then I knew that in spite of my ignorance of the woods, I had gone straight to my goal. I went down the farther side at once, keeping myself hidden in the brush as much as possible in case Madigan's crew should be on the lookout, and finding the trail along the river I went straight up toward the miners' camp.

A man was waiting for me as I stepped from the alder-brush into the clearing about the mine. My clumsy traveling had warned of my approach and he lay behind a pile of dirt before a shaft, a large blue pistol pointing straight down the trail where I emerged.

"Don't shoot!" I cried running toward him, with my hands in the air. "I'm a friend. I've come to warn you that a man named Brack with a crew of cutthroats is on his way to raid your camp."

The mention of Brack's name had a pitiful effect upon the man. He leaped back, his eyes shifty with fright, and made as if to run back to the cabins. He caught himself, however, and swung his pistol steadily on the trail behind me.

He was an old man with a patriarchal beard and a gentle face. When he saw that no one was following me he said—

"Come with me, stranger; we'll get Bill."

He retreated, walking backward, covering me and the trail with his weapon, while I followed. Arriving at the first shaft, still keeping his eyes on me, he called—

“Oh, Bill!”

A tall, laughing youth, with a soft, curly beard, came clambering out of the mine in response to his summons. At the sight of me his hand flashed to the pistol on his hip.

“Tell it to Bill, stranger,” said the patriarch. “Bill, the Laughing Devil’s back and this gentleman says he’s layin’ to come an’ clean us *pronto*.”

“Brack?” gasped the youth, with a frightened glance down the trail. “Foxy Brack?”

“Yes,” I said. “He’s here to rob you. He’s sent one of his lieutenants around the ridge to cut off your back trail. He has ten of the worst men in Christendom with him.”

“Oh, my God!” groaned the young man. Steadying himself he said, “Who are you, stranger?”

I told about the *Wanderer* and its party, and about the morning’s happenings as swiftly as possible.

“Why did you run the risk of coming here and telling us this?” asked the youth when I concluded. “And how do we know you’re telling the truth?”

“Bill!” said the old man reprovingly. “Can’t you see? Stranger, we take this right neighborly of you. My name’s Slade, and this is my partner, young Bill Harris. Pitt, you said your name was? Well, Mr. Pitt, you’re a man. This Brack, now, he’s a devil. Bill and me saved his life when he come ashore up at Omkutsk, and he spoke us fine and friendly, and acted like a man, and we took him in with us on this gold find.

“Then one day he tried to put us both out of business and we caught him in the act just in time. It’s hard to kill a man when you got him helpless, stranger, though we should ’a’ done it then. We give him a boat with grub, and when the wind was blowing offshore we sent him out to sea. The devil must ’a’ took care of its own, since he’s still living; and now he’s come back to clean us out. We been sort of ’fraid of it all the time.”

“How many d’ you say with him?” queried young Harris. “And all bad men, too, eh? God! There’s only two of us——”

“Bill,” said Slade patiently, “we can’t stay an’ fight him. You know what he is.”

“They’re circling round us now?” Harris was looking around wildly. “We’re cut off.”

“How many went around to cut our trail, neighbor?”

“Five.”

“We may be able to handle five of ’em, Bill,” said Slade. “We wouldn’t have no chance with ten. We mustn’t let ’em head us off. Brack ’ud use fire to make us tell where the gold is cached. We’ll start right away and travel light.”

Harris ran into the large cabin. I started to go back the way I had come.

“Wha-a-at? You ain’t going back to Brack’s boat, are you? Neighbor, there’ll be only hell where that devil is.”

“And for that reason I must go back there.”

“Why?”

“There is a girl—a young lady—on the yacht.”

Old Slade shook his head.

“That dirty devil! But we can’t stay and fight ten men and Brack. Well, Mr. Pitt, I reckon we owe you our lives and everything we got, but I dunno how we’re goin’ to square it with you.”

My eyes fell on the automatic pistol in his hand.

“You’re —— whistlin’!” cried Slade suddenly as he thrust the weapon into my hands. I put it inside my shirt. “That don’t square us. Best I can do, though. Now, Mr. Pitt—” he gripped my hand—“God bless yoh!”

XXIII

I HURRIED back down the river-trail until I reached the ridge. Here I quitted the way I had come and climbed away over the hills toward the sea. My plan was to step aboard the *Wanderer* while Brack was absent, and without being seen by any of his men. Hence, I gave the cove where I had struck down Barry a wide berth. In fact, I did not follow the windings of the fiord at all but struck straight across the rough country toward where I judged the sea to be.

I got lost twice. Once I found myself turning toward the fiord and once I had circled back toward the lake. It was well into the afternoon when I found the rough sea-coast and following it southward came to the mouth of the fiord and, from a hilltop looked down upon the *Wanderer* at anchor.

I saw now why my first impression of the morning had been that the yacht was surrounded by mountains. This was nearly so. The hills, one of which I was lying on, walled the fiord in on both sides, while across its mouth, shutting it in from the sea and leaving only a narrow channel on either side, lay a narrow, crescent-shaped island consisting of a fir-covered hill of equal height to those of the mainland.

The Hidden Country! It was the inevitable name for the region.

Small wonder that Kalmut Fiord was not on the maps. It lay behind its crescent-shaped island securely hidden from all the world. Outside, the dun, gray North Pacific heaved and murmured, a part of the busy world. Somewhere on its restless water ships were sailing, men were active in the doings of our day and age. But in the hidden country behind the island there was no such suggestion.

The fiord lay hill-ringed and calm, a part of the world, and yet not of it. Its green Spring foliage, delicate, masking gray hills and black cliffs, its quiet blue water, its virgin beaches, its very air, all were heavy with the primitive's eternal calm.

As I looked about I saw that the heights immediately about the fiord were in reality but foot-hills of a great valley. And the valley was ringed in by a mountain range. West, north, east—everywhere save toward the open sea southward—a curving wall of towering mountains shut it in. There was snow on most of the peaks, and others were wrapped in wisps of clouds. One great narrow gash, seeming to cleave the range down to sea level, was visible in the west. Save for this, the Kalmut Valley seemed a spot walled in by frowning stone.

The colossal scheme of the scene left me awed. The sense of the primitive which dominated it all held me spellbound. We had left the world with which I was familiar. This was the sensation that crept over me. We were in a new world—no, an old one, so old that modernity had nothing in common with it. Skin-clad, white-skinned vikings, might have stepped out on those moss-clad rocks and have fitted perfectly into the picture. But not the *Wanderer*, not its personnel—save Brack. Yes, Brack and that valley belonged together.

I shuddered and turned toward the yacht.

BRACK'S boat was gone. That was good. But I looked in vain for some sign of life aboard. Apparently the *Wanderer* was deserted. I waited in hope that some one might appear on deck and in response to my hail send over a boat, but after half an hour I gave this up. I was rested now from the unaccustomed strain of hill-climbing, and I was determined to reach the yacht.

The *Wanderer's* anchorage was probably two hundred yards from the shore on which I was lying and I had never been but a poor swimmer. But from an out-jutting point of the island it was but half that distance and to the island I turned my attention.

The channel separating the island and the mainland was about fifty yards wide. I swam it, after having divested myself of shoes and coat, ran along the island to the point nearest the yacht and plunged in again. The water of the fiord was like ice, and I had not swum far before my teeth were chattering. I was tempted to shout and call for help, but the caution which that day had instilled in me prevented this and I kept on in silence.

No one saw me as I came climbing up the *Wanderer's* starboard sea-ladder. My flesh, my bones, my marrow, were aching with the torture of cold. I staggered stiffly across the deck and rounded the main cabin. There I came upon Freddy Pierce in a deck-chair disconsolately rolling a cigaret.

We did not speak for some time.

At my appearance the paper fluttered from Pierce's limp hand, the tobacco dribbled unnoticed from the bag onto the deck and by this I knew that the sight of me must have appalled him. He stared at me, his lips opening and closing, and I stared back, uttering no word, as men do in moments when words are too slow a means of expression. I was freezing; I was near to collapsing; but at the sight of Pierce's appalled countenance my body seemed forgotten.

"Brains!" exploded Freddy at last in agony. "What the ——! Ain't she with you?"

"No," I said, "she is not with me."

Pierce rose from the deck chair, his boyish, freckled face white and sickly for the moment.

"Mean to say—" he licked his dry lips—"mean to say you ain't seen her?"

"I haven't seen her."

"He said—Cap' Brack said—you'd stayed up there with the men, and that you suggested Miss Baldwin'd like to come up and take a look."

"'Brack said?'" My mind refused to comprehend fully the significance of Pierce's bare words.

"Eyah. He said that the second time he was down—for lunch. Said you were up there. And Miss Baldwin got in the boat with 'em and went up there, thinking to meet you. Brains—Mr. Pitt!" he cried, springing forward and grasping my arms, "what's come off? What's Brack been pulling? Didn't you send that word to Miss Baldwin at all?"

"No."

I turned to go to my stateroom. I was like a man in a dream.

"Brains!" he whispered in agony, "didn't you hear what I said? She went away with Brack in a boat, and he lied about your being where they was going."

I released myself from his grasp.

"Yes, I heard. I must get a dry change."

I went straight to my room, Pierce following on my heels.

"Freddy," I said, as quietly as I could, "you had better get up to your wireless and send word to any ship within call to relay word to the nearest authorities that we need help."

He merely stared at me without moving.

"Go on," I said. "Send that message at once."

"Aw, Brains," he said gently. "Where's your thinker; you know better'n that."

"Do as I tell you. Don't wait to hear the story; start your wireless at once."

"You're up in the air forty miles," was his reply. "If you wasn't you'd know that Brack'd never leave me here on the yacht without putting the wireless out of business."

"What!"

"Yep. When they all turned up missing this morning, you with 'em, and there hadn't been anything said about it, I began to feel kind of cold below the ankles and I sneaked up to slip some juice into the air and try to put the revenue-cutter, *Bear*, hep to something doing here. She ought to be down this way just now. Well, nothing doing. The whole works are gone; Brack's put the wireless outfit on the bum."

Somehow I managed to be calm.

"Where's Wilson?"

Pierce's face clouded.

"A dirty shame! Wilson's laid up. Garvin's gun went off accidentally when they were coming on board and the bullet went through Wilson's leg below the knee."

"Riordan?"

"He's left in charge; yep. Chanler's keeping him in his room to talk to. The nigger's here, too. He had a row with Garvin last night and they left him behind to do scullion work. Simmons is sleeping."

"Chanler?"

"He's coming around. Cold sober, but shaky."

"Dr. Olson?"

"Went back with Brack on the second trip. Brack had him take his case and a lot of stuff, too."

"You mean that the captain came after Dr. Olson?"

"Yep. And Miss Baldwin. He made two trips, you know. First he came back early in the morning for breakfast, and said they'd found the mine, and you were staying up there to look around. He said we'd all go up after awhile. Then they went away. At noon they came back again. Then was when Doc' Olson and Miss Baldwin went with him. I tried to horn myself in but he details me to split the watches with Riordan and tells Riordan to see I stay on board. She—Miss Baldwin—asked if I couldn't go along, and he said no. Then she got into the boat, like she didn't know whether she wanted to or not, and they pulled away. And, Brains, I'm afraid—I got a hunch he's got her going south."

"Got who? Going where?" I asked, not comprehending his slang.

"Got Miss Baldwin—going south. You know: falling for him." Then as my expression continued to betray my lack of comprehension, "Brack can fool any woman, and he's got her charmed."

The pistol which the old miner had given me came to sight at that moment as I undressed, and Pierce gasped.

"You—packing a gat'!" he exclaimed. "What's happened? Where have you been if you haven't been up there with the crew?"

I continued my dressing without replying. When completed I again placed the pistol out of sight within my shirt.

"We'll go and see Wilson," I said. "Then I'll only have to tell my story once."

XXIV

WE FOUND the wounded man lying in his bunk calmly dividing his time between a book and his bandaged leg which was stretched out before him. There was no look of pain or mental stress upon his bronzed face. It was all in the day's work; he would not permit a little thing like a bullet through his leg to disturb his poise.

"I'm all right, sir," he said. "Be up soon."

"Wilson," said I, "how much accident was there about that shot?"

"I don't know, sir. Garvin was behind me when it happened. I don't mind saying that I'll settle personally with him for it when I'm on my feet again."

"Garvin is merely the captain's tool."

"He'll be a dull tool, sir, when I've paid him for his clumsiness."

I told him all that I had heard, and what had happened to me that morning. When I came to my affair with Barry and my escape to warn the miners his eyes widened.

"The captain planned well, didn't he, sir?" he said quietly. "The only thing—" he smiled a little—"the only thing he hadn't charted right was you, Mr. Pitt. He was far on his reckonings of you, sir, and so was I. He never expected that from you. You threw him off his course nicely, sir. You may have spoiled the whole cruise for him, though that's hardly probable. He always has a trick left."

"And what do you think his plans are beyond this, Wilson?" I asked. "He certainly can't intend to return with us to civilization after what he's done today."

"I've been thinking of that, sir," he replied. "And I always get back to remembering that the *Wanderer* is outfitted for two years. I've a notion that the captain's original plan was to rob these miners and then slip off to the edges of nowhere with the yacht."

"And what of us?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't tell, sir. As it is, you've put him off his course. If he doesn't make out on his robbery he'll have trouble with the men. He promised them a lot of easy gold. They're a hard crew and he'll have trouble handling them unless they catch those miners and make them give up the secret of where they've hidden the gold. If they catch 'em, the captain will get the secret out of them, you can bet on that. Then they'll come piling back here to get away as soon as possible to where they can blow their loot."

"And then we'll have to look out for ourselves, you mean?"

Wilson nodded.

"Well," said he slowly, "things like this ain't so bad for men, sir, but there's the girl."

The conversation ceased abruptly. We sat silent, each troubled by the same thought.

"Did he say when he would return?" I asked at last.

"No," said Pierce.

"How much grub did they take?" asked Wilson.

Pierce gulped.

"Not much. I heard him say there was enough up there for months."

"And not a hint of when they were coming back?"

"No."

We were silent again. Presently Wilson cleared his throat:

"Those fellows up there, the miners must have got away. The captain wouldn't take her up there if they were there."

"And he took the doc' with him, too," reminded Pierce. "Somebody must have got hurt."

"Were they hard men, these two miners?" asked Wilson of me. "They were, eh? Well, the way it looks to me, they hurt some of the crew and got away, and the crew is still after them. They'll be afraid to let 'em get away if they've had a fight. The miners would get word to the outside and they'd come back with help."

"But Brack can't be taking part in the chase if there is one," I interrupted.

Wilson shook his head.

"He came back here. He wouldn't be doing that if he was in the chase."

"And he took Miss Baldwin with him," supplemented Pierce.

"He probably sent the men on the chase as soon as he found that the miners had got away," continued Wilson. "Then he's alone——"

He caught himself; but we know what he intended to say.

"Chanler is better, you say?" I said, rising.

"Sure," said Pierce. "He's nervous and shaky, but he's a human being again."

"What are you going to do, sir?" asked Wilson as I stepped to the door. "Going up there? Well, there's a canoe in the port storage-room forward, sir?"

"Good! Pierce, will you get the canoe out and put it in the water? I'll go and have a little talk with Chanler."

"You bet! Say, Brains, wha' d' you do with the rifle you copped off Barry?"

I told him where I had hidden the weapon and went out. Chanler should have his chance. He must be a man now if ever. Riordan was with Chanler in the latter's stateroom when I entered. Chanler had come out of his madness. He was nervous and looked ill, but his eyes were sane again. He was lying in a lounge-chair with Riordan at his side.

"Good gad, Gardy! I *am* glad to see you!" cried George as I entered. "Here, sit down and talk to me; talk to me, you hear? Say something. Riordan, you're relieved. Take a rest, like Simmons. Gardy, say something. I've got to have somebody talk to me or I'll—I'll start hitting it up again."

Riordan was regarding me suspiciously.

"How did you come aboard?" he demanded.

"Never mind how he came aboard," interrupted George petulantly. "What d'you s'pose I care how he came aboard. He's here now. Sit down, Gardy, and talk. You can go, Riordan; I'll have you in when Gardy's winded."

Riordan went, scowling at me, and I seated myself in the chair he had vacated.

"Chanler, there is no time for me to talk to you for your entertainment," I began abruptly. "You're sober now, you're yourself, and you can't shirk responsibility on the pretense of being incapacitated. Brack got Miss Baldwin to accompany him up to the mine with the lie that I was up there and had suggested that she come up. He is up there with her—alone. And the devil only knows what his plans are."

Chanler merely shuddered nervously.

"Darn you, Gardy! Here I was just coming out of a sinking spell and you come along and spoil everything. Why do you bring me news like that? It—it disturbs me, really."

"No," I said, "you can't talk in that strain and have it accepted any longer, Chanler. You are a man again, not an alcoholic imbecile, and you've got to play the part."

I told him the true purpose of Brack's visit to Kalmut Fiord and of the day's events.

"And now, by a lie he has Miss Baldwin go with him. Chanler, we can't leave her up there with him, alone."

Chanler writhed and groaned.

"Oh, Gardy! You're terrible. What do you propose to do?"

"You are Miss Baldwin's host. You and I will take a canoe which Pierce is getting ready and go up to the mine."

"You're mad," he muttered. "What shape am I in to go anywhere?"

"The doctor is up there. It's a short paddle."

"But I'm not fit, Gardy; I tell you it will set me back."

"You've got the choice before you, Chanler. Do you want to drop back into what you've been for the past week, or do you want to be a man?"

"I feel so rotten, Gardy."

"You've got a chance now with Miss Baldwin. You're almost your old self. Come, man; this is your chance to win back your standing with her."

"I haven't got a chance," he said despairingly. "That's all off. I know it."

"And you're quitting—leaving Brack to have his own way?"

"Brack? Brack! What do you mean?"

"While you've been lying in your room Brack has been doing his best to fascinate Miss Baldwin. You should know something of the man's power. Well?"

"Brack?" Chanler was struggling to his feet. "Brack, eh? So he's after Betty, and you—you say he's made an impression?"

"You know the man," I replied bitterly.

He straightened, struggling to tighten the set of his jaw.

"Brack, eh?" he repeated. "Brack and little Betty. Oh, no. We can't have that. He doesn't belong. Get your —— canoe ready. I suppose we'll have to go up to this place, but I warn you, Gardy, I warn you I'm going to be awf'ly bored."

XXV

RIORDAN was inclined to be brusk to me when he saw the canoe going into the water. He was captain for the time being; he had given no orders for using any of the yacht's boats. Then came Chanler, grumbling and shuffling, and

Riordan's expression suddenly showed great elation which he tried hard to conceal.

"Pleasant trip," he said sarcastically. "Captain Brack'll be glad to see you."

Neither of us said a word as we settled ourselves into the canoe. George was angry with me for causing him to go, and I was eager only to reach the mine and Miss Baldwin and the captain. I hoped—no, I felt confident—that Chanler's appearance in his present condition would solve the most delicate and dangerous phase of the problem confronting us, which was a safe return of Miss Baldwin to civilization.

She had cared for George Chanler once, not deeply, she had admitted but enough to bring wistful moments at the thought of the change which had come over him. Now she would see him as she had seen him in those days when he had made upon her a favorable impression.

She would at once see the difference between Chanler and Brack. George was of her own kind; Brack was not. She would see this now; the spell which the captain had been weaving would be broken; and she would turn to her own kind. I felt that Brack's sole purpose in getting Betty up to the mine was to weave his spell more firmly; he would scarcely frighten her by display of brutality for awhile at least.

We paddled on in silence. The perspiration began to creep out on Chanler's forehead, but, though he swore at me beneath his breath, his paddle rose and fell steadily.

Evening came upon us with appalling suddenness. The snow-covered western mountains shut out the sun's rays, and at once the narrow bay grew dark. With the sun gone a chill crept through the valley. The scene became one of depressing gloom and Chanler broke out into querulous protest.

"Paddle," I said, when his words died out petulantly. "We're almost to the river."

We swung from the bay into the river and there the current took liberties with the light canoe. Chanler's experience in canoeing was much greater than mine, and now for the first time he roused himself and asserted his knowledge.

"Shorter strokes," he snapped. "Shorter and faster. Now! Drive her!"

In the struggle against the current he forgot his nervousness, and when we landed at the spot where Brack's boat had beached that morning he sprang out with a vim which he had not displayed since we left Seattle. We went straight up to the mine.

From a distance we saw candle-lights shining from the open door of one of the cabins and we hurried thither. We did not enter. In the single room of the cabin Miss Baldwin and Captain Brack were seated at a table upon which was placed a substantial meal. The captain was eating heartily. Miss Baldwin was looking across the table at him with an expression in which surprise and anger seemed equally mingled; and George and I stopped as one just outside the open door without being seen or heard.

Miss Baldwin was speaking.

"I wish to return to the yacht, Captain Brack," we heard her say. "Must I repeat that many times more?"

"No, no!" He did not look up, but we saw that he smiled. "It isn't necessary. I have good ears."

"Then why don't you answer me?"

"Perhaps because it amused me to hear you speak. Your voice is a delight to the ear."

By the flickering candle-light we saw that Miss Baldwin's mouth and chin became very firm.

"I am quite certain you have been lying to me, Captain Brack," she said quietly. "I don't believe that Mr. Pitt suggested that I come up here. If he had he would have stayed here and not have gone on with the men into the hills, as you say he has done."

Brack lifted his head.

"You hold a brief for Mr. Pitt, Miss Baldwin?" he laughed, looking at her closely. "Well, well; so there's a certain interest in that pretty little head for Pitt, eh? Well well! Pitt, the writer—the ultra-civilized person! And I thought it was only Chanler I had to fear. But never mind."

His playfulness vanished.

"You are in the North now, Miss Baldwin, and you will fall beneath the North's just rule. Back there, in your civilized country, you have lived under a different standard. Back there the most handsome male, the best mannered, most prosperous, best dressed, might win you. Even a Mr. Pitt would have a chance. Back there women are attracted to a man because his head is carried a certain way, because he orders a dinner excellently, helps one into a cab in a pleasing manner. That's not just, Miss Baldwin, not just. The nice man may not be the worthy man. But here—this is the North. The strong man wins here—only the strong man can win. Gold, women, everything. Life is primitive here, therefore just. And you are here now, and here you are going to stay. And here women fall to the strongest man. And that's me, my dear, that's me! Look at me."

He rose and leaned over the table toward her. The candles flickered and nearly went out. Betty sat upright in her chair. Still leaning forward, his eyes holding hers, the captain with his right hand moved the table to one side. There was nothing between them now, and Chanler started forward, but I caught him by the arm.

"Wait!" I whispered. For in the candle-gleam I had seen a new look on Betty's face. "Only wait!"

Brack was bending over her.

"Stand up!" he commanded, and she stood up in all the litheness of her slim young womanhood.

"Come to me."

She did not move.

"Come. I am your Man. You are—you are——"

His speech suddenly collapsed. Betty was smiling. The smile broadened. There was a moment of struggle and then she threw back her head and the cabin rang with peal after peal of lark-like laughter.

"Oh, Captain Brack!" she stammered, struggling to control herself. "That's too—too stagy! Too, too melodramatic!"

Again and again her merriment broke out, welling in gusts from compressed lips, like merry music that would not be suppressed.

"Forgive me, captain; it's not polite of me, but—but, oh! If you could only see yourself as I see you now!"

Brack stood and glared, dumfounded, impotent. His arms slowly fell to his sides; he drew back. On his face there was the amazement and anger of a schoolmaster outfaced by a pupil.

"Huh-huh! What's this?" he snorted. "It's very funny, no doubt, but—explain—explain!"

"That's just what you may do, cappy," said Chanler, stepping through the doorway. "Hello, Betty. Everything all right, and all that?"

One thing stood out in that room as we entered, and that was the swift play of expression on Betty's face as she beheld Chanler. First, it was surprise, then incredulity, then glad relief. And I read in her eyes that she was glad that George once more was fit, so she could care for him again.

"Why, George!" she cried. "You—you're sober!"

Brack's sharp laughter filled the room. He had recovered his poise; he was the captain again.

"Yes. A great surprise; so unusual for Mr. Chanler," he said; but his eyes were studying me.

"Cappy, I'm through with you," said Chanler. "You're a dear, interesting fellow, but this—this is too much, you know. You're fired."

The captain laughed again, but not for an instant did his eyes leave me. He was trying to bore into my mind, trying to learn what he wished to know without resorting to questioning words.

"So," he said softly. "I begin to understand. It was not Madigan who bungled it after all. Some one else warned Slade and Harris. I underestimated you, Pitt. Why, it has acted almost like a man."

"Thank you," I said. "I did warn Slade and Harris. I'm glad that I helped throw your devilish plans awry."

"And talks almost like a man," he continued with a touch of his old smile. "But as for interfering with my devilish plans, Pitt, you must not rejoice too soon. You have merely delayed the fulfilment of my plans, and you have made things very uncomfortable for yourself and your friends. When one acts like a man one must pay for it."

"That'll do, cappy," said Chanler. He had taken Betty's hand and was patting it assuringly while she looked up at him in wonderment. "I've told you that you're fired. You're not with us any more."

"Not with you?" Brack appeared to notice George for the first time. "No? I am not with you any more, but you see—you still are with me."

"Not at all, cappy. We leave you now. Sorry, cappy; enjoyed your society immensely, but, really, you know, this sort of thing can't be done."

To my great surprise the captain stood where he was, smiling tolerantly, while George and Betty moved toward the door.

"Miss Baldwin," he said suddenly.

Betty stopped in the doorway.

"Yes?"

"It was a very funny joke—whatever it was?"

"It was rude of me to laugh, I know," said Betty. "But I really couldn't help it."

" 'Really couldn't help it,' " repeated Brack mockingly. "A matter of temperament. Typical of the American young woman—to giggle at big moments. I shall cure you of giggling. You may go now."

" 'May go!' " stormed George. "That's insolent, cappy. What do you mean?"

"I give you permission to go."

"Well, hang you for your impudence!"

"Careful, Chanler. I might change my mind."

"Let me assure you, captain, that that would make no difference," I interposed. The pistol inside my shirt was pressing my ribs and I smiled with the confidence it gave me. "We will go when we wish, no matter what your mind on the subject may be."

For the second time in a few minutes his eyes bored into mine, seeking to read my thoughts.

"So you have a hidden ace somewhere, somehow, eh, Pitt?" he laughed. "I see that plainly; but I can't quite see what it is. You're growing, Pitt. One of your ancestors must have been a man. Ah! Barry's rifle—what did you do with it?"

"Wrong, captain, absolutely wrong!" I replied. "Barry's rifle isn't a factor in the present situation."

He studied me for fully a minute in silence and gave up, baffled.

"I have said you may go," he said curtly. "Go away. All things in their order; gold first, then woman." He seated himself at the table and resumed his eating. "Go as quickly, as swiftly as you please. But," he called as we went out, "I beg of you—as my guests, you understand—do not, please do not, go too far!"

Behind us as we hurried into the night we heard him laughing, his laughter some what smothered by mouthfuls of food and drink.

XXVI

"HANG him! What does he mean?" broke out Chanler querulously, as soon as we were out of hearing. "What does he mean, Gardy? What's he got up his sleeve? He means something. Probably got some of the crew waiting to waylay us, steal our canoe, or something like that. Hang it!"

"I don't think so, George," said Betty. "There haven't been any of the men about since we got here. They went straight on into the woods, and Dr. Olson and the captain went with them. The captain came back alone, something over an hour ago. He said the rest were hunting gold up in the hills and wouldn't be back for some time."

"Well, hang it! He's got something," began George again, but I managed to catch him by the arm and draw him back out of Betty's hearing.

"Forget yourself for the present," I whispered. "Think of Miss Baldwin a little."

"I think he's bluffing," I said aloud. "As Miss Baldwin says, there can't be any of the men around here. He was talking to frighten us. We'll go straight down to the canoe."

"Surely, surely!" said George, with an assumed laugh. "I see now he was bluffing. It's all right, Betty. Jolly, little evening party, I call it."

I dropped behind, letting them go on ahead, and I heard the rumble of George's voice without hearing what he was saying. But from its tone I knew what it was: he was apologizing, explaining, promising.

"I'm sorry I said what I did when I first saw you, George," Betty was saying as we neared the place where our canoe was tied.

"What was that? 'Bout my being sober? Ha! I deserved that, Betty; don't let that trouble you. It's all over now. Everything's turning out fine now, and—there's our canoe. Nothing to that bluff of cappy's, Gardy," he called back to me.

"Of course not," I said. "Now we'll just paddle home and——"

"And live happy ever afterward," he laughed.

Betty seated herself in the middle of the little craft without a word, and we remained silent while we shot down the river, into the bay, and turned our bow toward the yacht.

"Tell us all about it, Betty," said George, at last. "By Jove! You made cappy look foolish."

Betty waited several minutes before replying:

"Well, when Captain Brack came back the first time, in the morning, he said that you, Mr. Pitt, had decided to go with them when they left the yacht at daylight, and that you had remained up at the mine with the men. Then he went away again and returned about noon. He said that you were still up there, and that you'd suggested it would be a pleasant thing for me to come up when they returned. I don't suppose I should have gone, really, but there wasn't anything about that to keep me from going, was there?"

"Absolutely not," I said. "On the contrary it was quite natural that you should go."

"I know it. But at the same time I had a feeling—a tiny, tiny feeling—that everything wasn't quite right. There wasn't any reason why I should, unless possibly it was the way he looked at me. I can't explain what it was, but I had that feeling. I wanted to ask somebody, but—but——"

"Rub it into me, Betty," laughed George. "I deserve it: I wasn't fit to be asked anything."

"I didn't know then, George," she said gently. "You'll forgive me?"

"All my fault; make it up, though," he said. "Go on."

"Then I saw Dr. Olson getting into the boat, but still I didn't feel quite right about going. Then the captain—" she hesitated a moment—"Captain Brack said: 'Get in; you know you are coming with us. Don't delay.' And before I knew it I was in the boat and we were rowing away.

"There was a man waiting for us when we got up at the mine—that big, rough man."

"Garvin."

"And he spoke something to Captain Brack, and the captain and the doctor and the man hurried away into the hills on the other side of the lake. The captain said that you were out there with the men, Mr. Pitt, and that he'd tell you that I was there and you'd be back soon. Well, that's about all. I had a lovely time roaming around that lake by myself for hours. And every minute I was getting more and more convinced that the captain had lied. When he came back alone I knew that he had."

"Because he was alone?"

"No-o-o! Not only that. It was the way he looked at me. On the yacht I'd often wondered if he really was nice, or if he was just pretending. Now he'd quit pretending, and he—he wasn't nice at all. You can't guess what he did?"

I held my breath; I felt sure that George did likewise.

"He—he made me—cook that—dinner! He did. He said that he wanted to see me in the rôle of a real woman. I thought I'd better do it, to keep the peace. He sat and watched me and talked. He said that that was as things should be; said I'd be a real woman in time. I wasn't frightened, but it was—oh, thrilling, you know. Funny, too. I laughed a little at myself, because I'd always fancied I'd like to live the adventurous life, and here I had, and it wasn't nice at all."

"How come you weren't frightened?" interrrupted George.

"I don't know; I wasn't, though. Well, maybe I was once, when I asked him when we were going back to the yacht and he said for me to put the yacht out of my thoughts. Then I had a wild idea of making a sprint for the boat and getting away, but I remembered they'd pulled it up in the brush. Then I thought of running down the bay and swimming out to the yacht, but I knew I couldn't outrun him and outswim him. It was dark then, too, and I knew some of you would soon be up looking for me."

"You knew? How? You didn't know that Gardy," began George, but I cut him short.

"Of course," I said. "It was certain that somebody would be up soon after dark since you didn't return. Then what?"

"Then we sat down to eat. With tears and woe in my tones I must admit it, I wouldn't like to subsist on my own cooking. But Captain Brack has a better appetite. He fairly reveled in the fruits of my labors. Then he become personal, and then—then you came in and everything was lovely."

We paddled in silence for awhile.

"And so you were rather disappointed in cappy, Betty?" said George slowly.

"Yes. He wasn't nice at all, he was common, when he stopped acting."

"Wonderful chap, though," mused George. "Must say I enjoyed his company. Couldn't put up with him any more, however. Well, we won't have to. We'll leave him here—we'll sail tonight. Wilson can be captain. We'll have to go some place and get a new crew, I suppose. Then we'll go on to Petroff Sound. I—I'm really much better, Betty," he added softly.

"Of course you are, George. You don't know how glad I am to see you yourself again."

"Really, Betty?"

"Of course."

"It's going to be all right now, Betty. I'll make it all up to you."

"Of course you will, George," she said, and I splashed my paddle in the water so I might not hear.

I was an outsider, an incident. My mission had been to help straighten out a tangle for which George's condition had been responsible. I had succeeded. Good and well. Now Betty would have George's attention. She would see him as she had seen him when first she had learned to care for him; she would care for him again. She would forget Brack. She would forget this adventure. In her proper sphere back home it would become an incident; it would be something to laugh over—with George.

So I reasoned as we paddled down Kalmut Fiord, our eyes confidently searching the darkness ahead for the first flash of the *Wanderer's* welcoming lights. So little did I know about women, and especially about Miss Beatrice Baldwin.

Presently George stopped paddling.

"Gardy," he said in a strange tone.

"Yes?"

"Doesn't it seem to you we're pretty near there?"

I looked around. So absorbed had I been in my thoughts that I had not paid any attention to the distance we had traveled. Now I saw by the hills about us that we were nearing the foot of the bay.

"It's funny we don't see any lights," said George. "Let's sprint a little, Gardy."

We paddled at top speed for several minutes, but we fell back to our former stroke. No lights were in sight.

A sinister silence fell upon us. Our paddles rose and fell methodically, but in spite of the exercise I felt cold and faint.

"Here we are," said George anxiously. "Here's the point just above where the yacht's anchored. Soon's we get around this point we'll see her lights, sure."

Our strokes increased in speed and power. Once around the promontory which loomed ahead in the darkness and the lights of the *Wanderer* would gleam out to us a hearty welcome.

"Got to get there soon; got to!" muttered George. "I'm all in. Need some of the dope the doctor left for me. Need it badly."

We rounded the promontory. The mouth of the bay, down to the island which shut it in from the sea, was before us. And it was all dark, as dark as the bay behind us, with not a pin-prick of light disturbing the primitive night.

George stopped paddling.

"What—what?" he gasped. "Oh, oh, my God!"

I did not speak. I continued to paddle like an automaton. In five minutes we were floating over the spot where the *Wanderer* had lain. The yacht was gone.

XXVII

WE HAD little time to speculate on the problem of the *Wanderer's* disappearance. After the first moment of stunned silence Chanler broke down, promptly and completely.

"Hang it, hang it!" he cried, striking the bow of the canoe with his paddle. "This is too much. Your fault, too, Gardy. Now find the yacht."

"Steady, George!" I warned, as the light craft rocked dangerously. "You're in a canoe, remember. Keep still."

"Keep still, keep still! How d'you expect me to keep still? Isn't this enough to make a man nervous. Hang it! I can't keep still, I tell you. This is too much."

"It nearly was," I agreed. "A little more that time and we'd have been in the water."

"Then do something! Say something!" he commanded. "Where's the yacht? What are we going to do?"

"First of all, if you'll please sit still for a minute or two; we're going to get to land without tipping over. Will you sit still that long?"

"Go ahead! You've got me into this mess; now get me out."

"Only sit still," I pleaded and carefully guided the canoe towards the nearest land. This was the little out-jutting point of the island from which I had swum to the *Wanderer* that afternoon, and I did not breathe fully until I had beached the canoe solidly and the danger of capsizing from George's jerky movements was over. He stepped out hurriedly.

"My God! This is awful, awful!" he said hoarsely, looking around in the dark. "This is terrible! A fine mess you've got me into, Gardy."

"Why, George, it can't be so bad," said Betty cheerily, stepping out beside him. "The yacht's been moved that's all. We'll only have to find her new anchorage. It will be all right."

"All right? All right! Hang it, Betty; I'm in no shape to stand this sort of thing. It's Gardy's fault. He got me into it. Now what are you going to do, Gardy? Eh?"

"Look around for the yacht's new anchorage, as Miss Baldwin says," I replied. "She can't be far off."

"Can't be far off! Can you see her? Is she anywhere around? Don't you suppose we'd see the lights if she was near?"

"Not if they had no outside lights and the curtains in the cabin were down," said Betty soothingly.

"Rot, rot, rot! Didn't they know I was coming back? Weren't they expecting me? Wouldn't they have the lights out so we could see'em? Rot! They've gone. The yacht's gone. What are we going to do?"

"If you will just sit here quietly with Miss Baldwin," I said, "I'll take a look around. The yacht must be near, of course, and we can't help finding it."

The first part of this statement I felt to be true: the yacht must be near, for no stretch of imagination could picture Riordan putting to sea. On the other hand I recalled the countless crooked indentations of the fiord and knew there were a score of places where the *Wanderer*, with lights out, might be hidden. We might even have passed it without being aware of its nearness.

I pulled the canoe safely from the water and made my way in the darkness around the island to the open sea. But the sea was only a noisy waste with no light upon it. I went around the island, returning to my starting point, and no glimpse of the yacht or her lights did I have.

Betty now was sitting beside George, who had slumped down against a boulder, and was patting his hand and talking to him assuringly.

"I told you so," he whined when I made my report. "Nothing doing. She's gone. Now what in the world are we going to do? Eh?"

"The yacht must be somewhere in the bay. You mustn't worry so, George; it will all come out all right." Betty was speaking to him as one might to a frightened child. "Mr. Pitt has only started on his hunt, haven't you, Mr. Pitt?"

"Of course," I said, "I'll take the canoe and run up some of these inlets. She'll probably be there."

I paddled away from the island with an appearance of confidence that I did not feel. By this time I had begun to appreciate the ironic humor with which Brack had warned us not to go too far. This was his work, and as I recalled the sly certainty of his smile, such hope as I had of finding the yacht dwindled to a minimum. Nevertheless I searched the inlets on both sides of the bay for the matter of half a mile before I returned to the island with my admission of failure.

Chanler by this time had passed into the furious stage of nervousness. He was pacing swiftly up and down the beach, clenching and unclenching his hands and breathing heavily.

"I don't care—I don't care where you did look and where you didn't look!" he burst out as I stepped from the canoe. "You didn't find the yacht, and you've got me into this, and I can't stand it much longer; that's all."

He swung away and I followed and caught his arm savagely.

"If you would think of Miss Baldwin a little you might forget your nerves," I whispered.

I found myself repeating Wilson's words—"These things aren't so bad for men, but there's the girl."

"I know, I know, Gardy," he replied hoarsely. "I—I can't help it. Don't throw me down, Gardy; don't ball me out. I'm shaky. I can't help anything else. You've got to get me to that yacht where my dope is, or—or you've got to get me back to Doc' Olson."

"What!"

"You have. I can't stand it much longer." His voice was raised, regardless of Betty. "I won't, you hear? I won't stand it any longer."

He turned and rushed back to Betty, holding out his hands.

"You know how I feel, don't you Betty? You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, George," she said, taking his hands in hers, "I understand. But can't you sit down and quiet yourself a little?"

"No, no, no! I can't. Gardy, you've got to get me to the doctor at once. You understand, don't you, Betty?"

"Yes, George. You shall go to the doctor at once."

"What!" I cried. "Go back there now, when we're so well rid of Brack?"

"What else is there to do?" she said. "Can we do anything but help him? Please don't think of me. There isn't the least bit of need of that."

"I will do as you say," I said. "Is it your wish we go back there?"

"We must. You can see there's nothing else to do.

"You'll stay here——"

"Certainly not!" cried George. "Takes two to paddle; I'm in no shape am I, Betty?"

I could have struck him for that, but Betty said soothingly—

"No, George, you're not."

She was right. Chanler was in no shape to paddle any more, so Betty took his place in the bow, and, with George crouched in the middle, the journey up the fiord began. Save for an occasional groan or exclamation from George and a soothing response from Betty, we spoke but little.

I was lost in admiration of the manner in which Betty tackled the task before us. She sat up, slim and straight, bending but little to her paddle, but by our progress I knew the force which her young arms placed behind each stroke. There was no hesitation, no faltering, though I knew that she, too, dreaded returning to Brack in this fashion. She seemed to have forgotten herself in the need to help George; and the Spring-like youth of her reached back to me, putting new life into my tiring arms, new confidence in my troubled thoughts. I had for the moment almost fallen into despair, accepting Brack's will with us as invincible. Without Betty I would have felt that we were beaten. But there was the indomitable confidence of youth in the poise of her little head, there was inspiration in the swing of her young-woman body, and as we paddled on into the darkness my heart cried out:

"Bravo, Betty! Bravo, brave girl! We'll beat him yet."

XXVIII

THE problem of the *Wanderer's* whereabouts was one which offered no clue for its solution. One thing I felt certain: the yacht had not gone to sea. Whatever Riordan's wishes in that matter might be—and I knew such a move would have pleased him as revenge upon Betty and me—Pierce and Wilson would never have permitted it.

True, Wilson was crippled, but if I had gaged the man's character rightly it would have required more than a wounded leg to prevent his intervention in so colossal a piece of treachery. As for Pierce, with his terrible neckties and soul of gold, he would have died rather than allow Miss Baldwin to be treated in such fashion. More, he would be too clever to die; he would at least have escaped to join us.

The yacht must be somewhere in the fiord. Riordan would not have moved her without Brack's orders. These orders probably had been given at noon, and Riordan had waited until George and I were out of sight before obeying them. With the yacht hidden we would be at Brack's mercy in that wilderness, the only shelter and food being at the mine. The pistol in my shirt grated against my ribs as I dug viciously at the water.

Had Captain Brack been present when we reached the mine I am quite certain that we would have clashed.

The light was still burning in the cabin as we reached the mine-clearing, and with the pistol in my hand I walked straight up to the cabin door, leaving Betty to guide George, who now was staggering and groaning constantly. Brack was not there. In his place Dr. Olson was sitting, refreshing himself from the remnants of a meal and a bottle of whisky.

The sight of me brought a sudden end to his meal, for he promptly threw up his hands, crying:

"Don't shoot, Pitt! Great Scott! What's the matter?"

"Where's Brack?" I demanded.

"Put that gun away!" he stammered. "Man, you've got murder in your face."

I lowered the weapon and the doctor dropped his hands with a sigh of relief.

"Whew! I'm glad you aren't after me. You certainly can look fierce, Pitt. What's up?"

"Brack?" I repeated, but before he could reply Chanler lurched wildly past me into the room. His eyes fell on the doctor's bottle and he rushed for it like a madman. The professional instinct rose in Olson at the sight of him and he whisked the bottle out of reach. In the end Olson resorted to a hypodermic injection, and presently

George was dozing on a bunk in the corner.

"Whew! Close call," said the doctor looking down at his patient. "You got him here just about in time."

"Where is Brack?" I demanded. "And where's the yacht?"

"The yacht?" repeated Olson staring stupidly. "Our yacht? Isn't it——"

"No," I interrupted, "it isn't where it ought to be. It's gone. Do you know where it is?"

He shook his head.

"How should I know? I just got back here with my patients about fifteen minutes ago. The captain went up with the men then——"

"Patients?" said Betty. "Are some of the men ill, doctor?"

Olson grew confused.

"Well, well, yes. That is, they had a little—a little accident up in the hills. Two of them got hurt."

"Oh! Badly? Can I do anything?"

"Oh, no. No, no," he replied quickly. "No, you couldn't do anything for them, Miss Baldwin. It wouldn't do any good for you to see them. I've got them all fixed up in the other cabin. They're all right, I assure you."

"And the captain?" I reminded him.

"Why, when I got down here with those two men the captain was sitting here eating and drinking. He went up into the hills afterwards."

"And he didn't say anything about the yacht?"

"Not a thing."

I informed him of the evening's happenings, and of the *Wanderer's* disappearance. At that he gasped, and a look of comprehension came slowly into his eyes.

"Oh," he said. "Oh, so that's it, eh?"

"What's it?" I demanded.

He glanced at Betty, dropped his eyes to the floor, and looked at me significantly.

"Nothing at all," he said. "Aren't you starving, Pitt? You look it. As a physician I suggest you get some nourishment into your system at once, before you begin to suffer."

The unexpected quickness of wit on his part took me slightly aback, but I responded promptly.

"I'm fairly famished," I agreed, grasping at the remnants of food on the table. "You're right, doctor; I must eat at once."

It worked excellently. Betty, instantly solicitous, flew about to prepare a meal for me, and under the pretense of gathering fire-wood Dr. Olson beckoned me outside.

"Those men—my patients—were shot," he said swiftly. "And two others, Madigan and a seaman, were killed."

A day before such news would have shocked me inexpressibly. Now it seemed only a normal result of the circumstances which Brack had woven about us all.

"And Slade and Harris? Did they get away?" I asked eagerly.

"I don't know anything about anybody by those names," he replied. "All I know is what Brack told me: that our men were attacked by a couple of outlaws while hunting in the hills, with the results that I've told you. These outlaws shot our men."

"And did those other fellows—the outlaws—get away?"

"For the present, yes. But Brack's men are guarding the only pass by which they can get out of this valley, so they can't get away. The captain says he'll get them if he has to hunt all Summer. He's managed to get roaring drunk."

"And he said something about Miss Baldwin, too, didn't he? What was it?"

"Well, he was drunk, you know. It makes him look and act and talk like a devil."

"Go on."

"He said, 'I expect we'll have company here tonight, doctor.' Said you and Chanler had come and taken Miss Baldwin back to the yacht. 'But I've a feeling they'll come back here,' he says. 'She can't resist me. Yes,' he said, 'they'll be back, and this time they'll stay.' Then he took out a big knife and cut himself in the hand. 'The blood of kings, doctor,' he said. 'I'm king of Kalmut Valley, and I'll make cripples of Pitt and Chanler, and have them for my jesters, and—' Well, he was drunk, you know."

"Say it," I commanded. "What else did he say?"

" 'And I'll tie 'em up,' he said, 'and let 'em watch me make Miss Baldwin my queen.' I told him he'd better let me tie up his hand, and he hit me across the face with it and went off into the hills. That's all."

"No," I said, "there's more to this."

I told him why Brack was after Slade and Harris. He was skeptical at first; men didn't dare do such things nowadays; Brack's wild talk had been only the raving of too much whisky. In the end, however, he was convinced.

"Then this scientific expedition was only the captain's way of getting an outfit for robbery on a big, piratical scale! By George! The man's big, isn't he? A regular pirate's raid in this year of our Lord! And yet it's all simple and easy up here when you think of it, isn't it?"

"Devilishly so. But it became more serious than mere robbery when Miss Baldwin came on board. Now, are you going to help us, doctor, or——"

"Of course. I'm civilized, I hope. But what can we do, Pitt? The captain's got the men, and he's too strong——"

"Dinner, gentlemen!" came Betty's fresh young voice. "Honesty impels me to warn you, Mr. Pitt, that I'm a horrible example as a cook, but such as 'tis, 'tis ready."

I was in no frame of mind to be a judge of Betty's cooking. I ate ravenously, because I was hungry, but my thoughts were not upon the food. Dr. Olson's picture of Brack in his cups was of a piece with the impression I had gathered of him early that morning. He had thrown off the mask and his true nature, raw, rank, savagery, was in full sway.

"When do you expect the captain back, doctor?" I asked casually.

"I don't know. He probably will be back tonight, though. He warned me not to drink up all the whisky as he'd want some when he got back."

I turned to Betty.

"Captain Brack is intoxicated, Miss Baldwin," I said. "The doctor and I do not think it would be pleasant for you to be here when he returns."

"No," said the doctor, "you mustn't be here then, Miss Baldwin."

Betty's wide-open eyes grew wider, but there was no alarm in the quiet gray depths of them.

"I understand," she said, nodding thoughtfully. "I will do whatever you suggest, Mr. Pitt."

There lay the trouble. I had nothing to suggest, nor had the doctor. Flight suggested itself first of all, but in that wilderness, with only a light Peterboro canoe and a rough sea as means of escape, the success of such a move seemed improbable. To bring our fate to a crisis by remaining there openly, defying Brack and appealing to the men for help, would have been suicidal. Had we been on the yacht strengthened by Pierce and Wilson, such action might have had a basis of reason.

Really thoughts of Pierce and Wilson kept me from losing hope at that moment. Though by now I had more confidence in myself than I had thought possible, I did not feel that I was capable of finding a solution to the problem confronting us. But there were Pierce, the shrewd, and Wilson, the brave, still to reckon with. What were they thinking at that moment of our failure to return to the yacht? What would Pierce's sharp mind be doing but seeking a way to assist us, or, at least Miss Baldwin, to safety?

And then I looked at Betty, quietly serious, but not alarmed, and my spirits rose at the sight of her. It was no strength of mine that raised my courage then; it was the strength I drew from the courage of Betty. Once more, as in the canoe, I felt a desire to cry out:

"Bravo, Betty! Bravo, brave girl! We'll beat him yet."

It was well that I did not cry out. For in that instant, from out on the back trail, came a maddened bellow, scarcely human in tone, yet recognizable as coming from no one else than Captain Brack.

XXIX

I GLANCED instinctively toward the back of the cabin, at the large, sack-covered window cut in the logs.

"Out that way, Betty!" I whispered, tearing down the sacking.

It was the first time I had called her by that name. She obeyed promptly.

"George?" she whispered, as she stood ready to climb through the window.

"No," said Dr. Olson. "He's helpless—I'll stay here. Hurry!"

I was stuffing my pockets with food, with a snuffed candle, scarcely conscious of what I was doing. Also, in the same instinctive manner, without any conscious thought, yet somehow realizing that it was a vital action, I snatched a blanket from Chanler's bunk and threw it over my shoulder.

"We're going to the cave where I hid the rifle. Tell that to Pierce, doctor; he'll understand."

"Yes. Hurry, for God's sake!" he whispered. "Good luck."

Betty went through the window with a lithe vault and a noiseless drop outside. I followed, dropped beside her, and, catching her hand, led as silently as possible away from the cabin until I felt sure we were out of hearing. Then we swung carefully back through the brush to the river trail at a point well below the mine clearing.

"Now for the canoe!" I whispered. "Come on!"

I ran as I had not run since a boy, and as I glanced back over my shoulder I saw Betty following closely.

We found the canoe where we had left it. Betty was in the bow before I had it untied. I pushed off, and, regardless of the rocks, we paddled furiously down-stream for the open water of the bay.

Not until we had entered the fiord and put an out-jutting cliff between ourselves and the river-mouth did we relax. Then Betty laid her paddle across the bows, bowed her head, and a tremor shook her slim body.

"Don't—don't, Miss Baldwin!" I pleaded. "On my word and honor I feel absolutely confident that we are safe now."

To my surprise she replied—

"I feel safe, too."

"You're tired, then, and cold. Put the blanket about you, and rest. I'll paddle the rest of the way."

She shook her head, and resumed her paddling.

"It wasn't that. It wasn't that, please. I've camped out often. But George—poor George!"

Her words came as a shock to me. So George still occupied first place in her mind. I had been right: she had seen George as he had been when first she had learned to care for him; and she had realized that she still cared. Her first thought in the moment of our hurried flight from the cabin had been of him. Even though she had seen him go to pieces piteously she still cared. She thought of him before all others. Well, that was as it should be, as I had hoped it would be when I brought George up to the cabin, sane and sober, and in his right mind. It was right.

But Fate persisted with its tantalizing pranks, for here was I, an outsider, still necessary in the task of bringing George and Betty to the haven of safety and happiness. The doctor would look after George; I felt sure that Chanler's condition would keep him free from any cruelty by Brack. I would do my best to look after Betty.

She would be very happy, too. She had the faculty of happiness. That faculty was saving her from the torture of fear now; it would be a guarantee of future happiness for her and George. Verily, when a man forecasts a woman's ways he is as a child!

My reason for going to the cavern on the hillside was twofold. The place offered a fair shelter for Betty where she could lie hidden safely. I also wished to recover the rifle which I had taken from Barry.

I was certain that sooner or later Pierce would make an attempt to join us if it was possible, and with the rifle and my pistol we would at least be two armed men. If Pierce came, even though Brack was in possession of the yacht, we could strike out through the wilderness, keeping near the coast, in hope of finding a settlement.

In spite of the darkness we easily found the inlet where Barry's negligent watching had given me an opportunity to escape. At first I thoughtlessly steered the canoe straight at the sandy beach, but an instant before our bow would have run up on the sands the same instinct which had prompted me to snatch food and blanket from the cabin, warned me to back water. Brack would have his men out by daylight searching the bay for signs of our whereabouts. If we landed on the soft sand of the beach the canoe and our tracks—especially the rubber heels of Betty's outing shoes—would easily be seen.

On one side of the inlet a ledge of rock jutted into the water and toward this I now turned the canoe, explaining to Betty the reason for so doing.

"How did you ever think of that?" she exclaimed. "You haven't done these things before, have you?"

"Not since I was a boy," I replied.

"Did you play Injun then?"

"Of course. All boys do."

"I'm glad."

"So am I; it's helpful just now."

"Yes; but I didn't mean that."

"What then?"

"Because if you played Injun you must have been a regular boy, and regular boys have such a lot of jolly fun, Mr. Pitt?"

"Yes?"

"Don't you ever feel like playing Injun now? No? Too old and dignified? Never play Injun any more?"

I laughed negatively as I swung the bow toward the rock.

"Shucks! It's too bad," she said. "You play it so well it's a shame you don't like to do it."

We ran alongside the ledge and found that its flat top was just out of reach above our heads. A canoe offers no safe foundation to leap from and for the moment I was nonplused.

Betty, her hand resting on the flat surface of the rocks, found a crevice. On closer examination it proved to be only a slight crack, not large enough to provide a foothold, but Betty was thrusting at the opening with the blade of her paddle.

"Ah! There we are!" she chuckled, as the thin paddle entered the crack. "There's a step for us."

"How did you ever think of that?" I exclaimed.

"I used to play Injun, too," she replied.

With the paddle as a step I was able to reach the top of the ledge and draw myself up. Betty then passed me the paddles and the painter of the canoe. Lying flat down on the ledge I stretched my arms downward until our hands met. Her strong warm fingers gripped my wrists and I promptly imitated her grasp.

"Now!" I said, and as she leaped I pulled upward with all my might.

Her hair brushed my eyes as she came up over the edge, and when our fingers released each other's wrists, I was vaguely conscious that something strange had happened, though I did not know what. We drew the canoe up together. It had been my intention merely to hide it in the brush out of sight of the bay, but now another idea presented itself.

I gave Betty the paddles and with the canoe on my back started up the hill for my cave.

"No, sir," objected Betty. "That isn't fair. If we're going to play Injun I want my share of the game."

I protested; the distance was short, the weight slight; but in the end the march was resumed with each of us sharing equally the weight of the canoe.

A seventy-pound canoe is no burden for two people in the open. But our way lay in the darkness up a rocky ridge, through brush and timber, and we tripped and fell, ran into trees, got caught in the brush, and suffered other minor mishaps until I stopped and insisted that Betty allow me to carry the canoe alone.

"No, sir," she repeated firmly. "I'm not stumbling any more than you are. Be fair and let me play, too."

We compromised by putting down the canoe, and, leaving Betty to wait beside it, I went on to locate my cave. I found it, as I had that morning, by stumbling into it.

I struck a match and glanced at the spot where I had hid the rifle. Then I stood staring dumbly until the match burned down to my fingers. For the second time that night I experienced the same shock; the rifle was gone; some one had been in the cave.

WHEN I returned to Betty my self-control had been regained. Whatever the significance of the rifle's disappearance might be Betty must have shelter for the night, and the cave was the only place available for that purpose. We carried the canoe thither and I lighted my piece of candle and stepped down.

The cave really was a wedge-shaped opening in the side of the hill, its mouth probably twenty feet across, and about the same in depth. Betty cried out as the candle-light revealed the place.

"Why it's almost jolly! It's a perfect place to play Injun."

We slid the canoe down and placed it as near the back of the cave as it would go.

"That," said I, "is going to be your bed," and clambering out I began to gather armfuls of fragrant small branches and brush.

The canoe was soon half filled, and, spreading the blanket over the boughs, I said—

"Whenever you are ready to retire, there is your chamber."

"How jolly!" she cried.

Then she stopped. A new expression, which I misread, came into her eyes.

"I have my lodgings up the hill a ways," I said hurriedly. "I'll bid you good night."

"Mr. Pitt!" she said, and for the first time her under lip trembled suspiciously.

"It's a considerable distance away," I assured her. "I'll be quite out of sight. Really, you needn't——"

Her lip ceased trembling. A tiny twinkle came into her eyes, a trace of a smile showed in the corners of her mouth.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "I believe that you—you think I'm worrying—about being alone with you!"

I looked at her stupidly.

"Well, weren't you?"

Her smile vanished.

"Oh, what a perfectly selfish pig you must think me, Mr. Pitt!"

"Good heavens, no! Anything but that. But — but we're alone — no chaperon — wasn't that the natural thing to think?"

"The conventional thing, you mean! And —and we're playing Injun together!"

"But—but you looked!" I stammered protestingly. "What were you thinking about?"

And she replied—

"I was wishing we had two canoes."

Presently she said—

"How are you going to sleep, Mr. Pitt?"

"On a bed of boughs."

"Where?"

"Oh, there's plenty of room all around."

"And no shelter? Suppose it rains? Why do you wish to leave this cave?"

"My dear Miss Baldwin!" I protested.

"Shocked?" she said mournfully. "I can't help it. It seems so ridiculous to think of such things out here. We—we're Injuns. See, there's a nice corner right near the opening, yet with a roof over it. We can fill that with boughs. I—I'd get frightened, really, if you left me here all alone."

"Putting it that way, of course——"

"That's right. Now I'm going to help make your bed."

Fifteen minutes later, perhaps, I lay down upon a pile of branches near the mouth of the cavern and blew out the candle.

"Good night," came Betty's voice from the canoe.

"Good night."

Silence reigned. We were tired; soon we grew drowsy. Just before she fell asleep Betty murmured—

"Mr. Pitt!"

"Yes."

"I still insist 'tisn't fair—we haven't got —two canoes."

XXX

THE cave became still. Snuggled down in her bed in the canoe Betty had fallen asleep as readily as if in her bed in the owner's suite aboard the *Wanderer*. Sleep pressed on my eyelids, too; my body, tired from the unwonted exertions of the day, demanded insistently the boon of recreating slumber.

I fought off my drowsiness, however, and lay curled up on my bed of boughs, facing the cave's mouth, and tried to think. Yet though I realized that I was awake it all seemed like a dream, such a dream as youth dreams when the call of Romance and Adventure still is real.

I was Gardner Pitt, writing man; my accustomed environment, the carefully barbered, denaturalized life of my set in New York. No, that must be a mistake. That New York existence seemed too far away to be a part of my present life. That was the dream; this the reality. I was Gardner Pitt, but I was not a writer; I was simply a hundred and sixty pounds of man, and I was sleeping on a pile of brush at the mouth of a cavern, in which slept a woman guarded by my presence. And it all seemed so natural, so vital and true a field for a man's activities, that for the time nothing else had significance. True, this was not my woman that I was guarding, but another's. But no thought of this entered my mind at the time. I did not think at all beyond the problem of escaping from Brack.

I placed my pistol in my right hand, determined to lie awake through the night.

I must have fallen asleep immediately after this, because when I was awakened by the rays of the morning sun slanting into the cave, the pistol lay with my relaxed hand upon it. I started up with a sensation of guilt.

With my pistol in my hand I peered out of the cave. more than half expecting to find Brack calmly awaiting me with his tantalizing smile in its place. But no human presence disturbed the primitive peace of that hillside that morning. A covey of feeding grouse lifted their heads and looked at me without fear. Birds were singing, the sun was bright and warm, and down on the blue water of the bay a pair of tiny ducks played.

I turned to look at Betty and was greeted by the sight of a very tousled, half-awake little head, peering over the side of the canoe.

" 'Mornin'," murmured the little head sleepily.

" 'Mornin'," I replied.

"Oo-oo-ah!" The little head yawned tremendously. "Wha' time is 't?"

It was 7:02 by my watch as I consulted it.

"Oo-o-wah!" Little head looked at me appealingly. "Do we got to get up so early when we play Injun?"

"Only the hunting Injun's got to get up so early. Other Injuns sleep as long as they please."

"Hunting? What for?"

"Oh, for a nice, big white yacht, for one thing. I'll be gone only a short while. In the meantime you sleep."

"O-um-mum," murmured the little head and sank comfortably out of sight in the canoe.

Parting the brush that hid the cave, I stepped out and went down the hillside a short distance. Looking back I was pleased to find that the cave was so well hidden that unless one knew its location it might be passed close by without its existence being suspected. Save for the possibility that man who had taken the rifle was one of Brack's gang the cave offered a fairly safe hiding place.

My first move was to assure myself that the yacht was not anchored near by. I went cautiously up the bay for half a mile, scrutinizing each inlet in vain for a sight of the *Wanderer's* white sides. I then swung up into the hills, marching a circle around the cave, impelled by the instinctive desire to ascertain the possible presence of any enemy.

At a distance of a city block from the cave I found a tiny spring sending its rivulet down the hillside to the bay, and as I lay down to drink I saw huddled beneath a tiny fir a flock of grouse watching me from a distance of ten or twelve feet.

Instinct promptly whispered: "Food" and I recalled the scant supply I had taken from the cabin, and reached for my pistol. The pistol, however, would roar like a cannon in that morning stillness and my supply of ammunition was limited to the ten cartridges in the magazine.

Lying motionless I looked around until my eyes fell upon a club. It was out of reach, but the foolish birds, confident that they were hidden, sat still while I secured the club and hurled it with all my might into their midst. I leaped forward instantly, and in the roar and flurry of the covey's rising pounced upon two fluttering birds which my club had stunned.

Betty was up and wide awake when I returned to the cave. She had made her hair into one thick braid which hung down her back, and her face was rosy from sound sleep. She shuddered first at the sight of the birds.

"Oh, the poor, pretty things!" she murmured, stroking their feathers. "I wish you hadn't hurt them."

"I didn't hurt them," I replied. "They never knew what struck them. I didn't like to do it, but we must find our own food, or surrender to Brack."

She looked at the birds wistfully and said nothing as I led her to the spring. I left her splashing the ice-cold water upon her face and proceeded to dress the birds. When I returned to the cave she was waiting with her sleeves rolled up and a set look in her eyes.

"I can cook them," she said firmly. "That's my share of the game. You cut them in two and put a stick through the pieces and hold them before a hot fire that doesn't smoke."

"Any fire that we have must not smoke," I said. "The smoke would show above the trees and be seen."

"Then we must have perfectly dry wood," she said quickly. "A small fire and dry; that doesn't smoke."

We set about gathering the wood together. Between two stones at the cave's opening we built out fire, watching it jealously, to see that only the minimum of smoke arose from it in the clear air. Betty put her conscience to rest as she regarded the dressed grouse, composed mainly of succulent breast.

"They must be intended for food," she said, "or they wouldn't be made as they are."

I agreed with her emphatically, and with a skewered half bird in each hand we sat down before the fire and proceeded with our cookery.

Freshly killed spruce grouse, roasted before an uncertain fire, and without salt, do not make ideal breakfast food, a fact which we discovered soon after the birds were done.

"I believe," said Betty, when she had nibbled at half a bird, "I have had enough."

"I have other viands in my pocket."

"To be saved for future reference," she laughed.

"We'll wrap the rest of this wild poultry up in nice clean leaves and save it for another meal."

"We will. It will be tasty when cold."

At the spring where we went to wash down the meal with drafts of water, Betty's eyes began to twinkle and the corners of her lips twitched suspiciously.

"Well, we've perfectly beautiful drinking water, at least," she said, and smothered her laughter behind both hands.

"Now then," she said briskly, when we were back in the cave, "are we going to occupy this apartment for some time, or do we continue our travels of last night?"

I told her that it seemed best for us to stay in hiding.

"All right. Then let's try to brighten the place up a little. We don't have to sit here and look at these black stone walls just because we're playing Injun. Come and help me; I love to select furnishings for a room."

FROM the hillside near the cave we gathered more branches and brush. Pine, spruce, birch and willow, budding into the full growth of Summer, came by the armfuls into the cavern.

"*You* never would have thought that this place needed decorating, would you?" said Betty, as she set to work. "Certainly not. This rough roof offers a shelter; these harsh walls hide us from our enemies. So you, being a mere man, think it's all right. Ha! I'd hate to be a mere man."

She was flying about the cave, fastening branches in the clefts of the rock, stepping back to view the results, altering her arrangements, apparently so lost in her work as to have forgotten our true situation.

"Now hand me that birch branch—the white contrasts beautifully with the green pine; now another piece of pine, now some more birch. There. That's what you call repetition of color, isn't it? You don't know? Gracious. How can men be so ignorant of the really important things of life!"

On the rock forming the roof of the cave we found a patch of moss, velvet soft to the touch, and a gentle brown and gold in color. With a stick I loosened great pieces from the rock and bore it carefully within where Betty directed the carpeting of the cave. When a large piece reached its destination intact Betty beamed; when the moss broke between my outstretched hands she pouted.

"I think so long as Nature goes to the trouble of creating a carpet for us it might as well do a good job and make it strong enough to stand transportation."

But when the cave was carpeted with its soft, yielding cushion of moss she clapped her hands in delight.

"Look at it!" she cried, embracing the cave with a gesture. "Why, it's cozy; people could almost live here."

Our coming and going had trodden down much of the brush which had so thoroughly hidden the cave, and with some of the branches left over from Betty's decorations I proceeded to weave a screen over the opening. When I had completed it I crawled out and inspected my work from a distance. The cave now was hidden more thoroughly than ever. Brack must look long and carefully to find us.

When I slipped back into our shelter I surprised Betty sitting on the canoe with her head bowed upon her hands in an attitude of dejection. She looked up, smiling bravely, but her cheerfulness was only surface-deep.

I looked away without a word, as did she, but in that moment we had confessed to one another that our display of high spirits had merely been acting, each wishing to help bolster up the courage of the other. We sat so for some time. Betty finally broke the silence.

"Well," she said quietly, "there's no use pretending any more, is there?"

As I had no reply she continued—

"We might as well admit out loud that neither of us feels—well, exactly jolly about it."

"That's true," I replied inanely.

We were silent again.

"What—what are we going to do about it, Mr. Pitt?"

"There is nothing much to do; we are safe for the time being. So long as we keep out of Brack's sight we are safe. For the present we could do just that—and hope."

Betty heard me without a word. Once more she bowed her face upon her hands, and her girlish shoulders trembled. I was at her side in an instant.

"Don't, Betty, please don't!" I pleaded. "You mustn't give way. It's rough, and it's hard, specially hard for a girl like you, but don't give way for—for my sake. It's been your fine courage and cheerfulness that's kept me from showing that I'm really a coward. Yes, it is; you've kept me from being a coward. Don't —please don't be afraid. We'll get out of this all right somehow, sure."

She looked at me, her eyes moist, but with her old thoughtful look in them.

"Do you really believe we will, in your heart, Mr. Pitt?"

"Most emphatically I do."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"Then you only hope——?"

"No; I believe."

"Oh!" she cried suddenly. "I hope—I pray—that you're right; because it's all my fault, all my fault, and I'd never forgive myself if I'd brought harm to you—or George."

Once more the sound of George's name on her tongue shocked me. Could she never get the man out of her head?

I picked aimlessly at a birch bough over my head, and each little budding leaf that I plucked away seemed like the tiny dreams which unconsciously had been in my mind all morning, and which now were driven away. The dreams that come to a man willy-nilly, without reason, without basis of hope. It probably was the stress of yesterday, the natural romance of a cave in the wilderness that were responsible. Well, I had that, anyhow; hours with Betty, in the sunlit, primitive woods. The memory of that would remain. Why, I was rich, richer than I had ever been in my life.

"Will you allow me to say something serious, Betty?"

Her look was startled, apprehensive, but her eyes gave consent.

"These hours have been the biggest of my life."

I stopped. Betty was looking at the ground. And suddenly all the winds of the world seemed to be drawing me toward her, urging me to throw myself beside her, and a stream of words was upon my tongue.

I reached up, plucked a twig of pine from its cleft, and when I had stripped its needles one by one my self-control had returned.

"So you see I'm a winner," I laughed. "You mustn't worry one little worry about me. Whatever happens I'm ahead of the game."

It was a long time before she spoke, and then she did so without looking up.

"Is—that—true?"

"Can't you see it is?"

She nodded without looking to see.

"And—is that—all?"

"Isn't that plenty? The biggest hours of my life—to have and remember?"

She poked her white toe into the moss, but still her eyes were on the ground.

"I feel awf'ly guilty," she said faintly. "It's all my fault. The whole thing is my fault. Poor George! If it hadn't been for me he never would have met Brack, and then all this would not have happened."

"George probably is all right by this time. He is under Dr. Olson's care, and the doctor is one of us."

"I've made him suffer terribly, haven't I?"

"No. If he hadn't—" I checked myself. "You haven't made him suffer. And he'll be a wiser man when you see him again, and you'll both forget and be happy together."

Betty lifted her eyes and studied me closely. Her expression was puzzling; she seemed incredulous. A quizzical smile touched her lips; she suppressed it and looked away.

"And George," she said, as if her thoughts had wandered away from him, "I must make up for it all to him—if I can."

"If you can! Of course you can. You will!"

Again she lifted her head and looked me squarely in the eyes. And this time when she looked away I knew that I was a fool, though I did not know just why.

XXXI

IT WAS now near ten o'clock and we soon would know whether our hiding-place was a safe one. I knew that it was safer than would have been a flight through the woods, where Brack and his men might be prowling, yet I was so apprehensive that the sight of Brack's big head thrust through the brush, his old sneering smile on his lips, would not have surprised me in the least. But no one came.

The forenoon passed without sight or sound of human being. At noon we were more hungry than we had been at breakfast. The spruce grouse had improved remarkably in flavor. In fact we agreed as we devoured what remained of them that seldom had we tasted better food.

"And nourishing; I'm sure they're very nourishing," said Betty. "They improve on acquaintance, as one's appetite grows less finicky."

My hopes began to rise as the hours passed with no sign of the appearance of Brack or any of his men. Apparently it was no man of the captain's who had found the cave and removed the rifle. Then he had no way of knowing where we were hidden; we were safe at least for the present. When I explained this to Betty she said quietly—

"I've felt safe all the time, Mr. Pitt."

"And quite right, too," I replied. "The situation hasn't been what any one but a pessimist would call dangerous."

"Mr. Pitt!"

"What?"

She looked at me gravely for several seconds.

"I'm not a child, Mr. Pitt; it isn't necessary to lie to me."

"What! Lie to you?"

"Please. I understand how you feel about it. I'm a weak, carefully reared and sheltered girl who must be treated as a child, sheltered from everything unpleasant, and lied to about—about the fact that she is in danger, because she has happened to attract a brute; and that your life is in danger because you're hiding her."

"But, really——"

"Well, you needn't keep up the pretense, Mr. Pitt. I've known all the time. I've known better than you have; the woman can know better, you know, even if she is a girl. I've known ever since Captain Brack came toward me last night up there in the cabin. His eyes were like—like he'd dropped a curtain and let me see a lot of uncaged wild beasts baring their teeth to me. I knew then—more than you could; and I know that he won't give up—ever."

"As I recall it," I said when I could speak with a calmness equal to her own, "you laughed at him at just the moment that you saw all this?"

"Of course. We couldn't let him see we were scared, could we?"

"And in the canoe, you sang——"

"That was partly for George's sake. And then I did feel safe; and have felt so ever since."

"And all your high spirits—playing Injun—fixing up the cave, and so on, have all been acting?"

"No. Certainly not. I tell you I do feel safe."

"Why?"

Again she smiled inscrutably.

"You wouldn't believe me now if I told you. Some day maybe you will. Then I'll tell you—if you ask. But you must not ask now."

For the present I, too, felt safe. But only for the present. Brack would not give up. That implacable will would have its way and the hunt for us probably was on at that moment. Brack, realizing our helplessness in the wilderness, would know that our field of flight would be restricted to the vicinity of the fiord, and with his men would search the hills relentlessly. I blessed the fate that had sent my feet stumbling into our well-hidden cavern.

As I weighed the chances of our discovery—which chance consisted practically of some literally blundering into the cave—I considered our plight in a more favorable aspect. The doctor would deliver my message to Pierce, and Freddy would pass on to the others the secret of our place of concealment. Dr. Olson, Freddy, Wilson and George, by this time probably knew where we were.

There was a world of consolation in this thought. They would communicate with us; Freddy would see to that. Yes, we would hear from our friends before much longer.

But as the hours passed with no sign of such good fortune I began to doubt. What were our friends doing? What were they thinking of? Didn't they realize that every minute which we passed in this uncertainty was a minute of torture?

Betty's patience seemed to grow as mine diminished. She had begun to weave a mat out of the branches which we had carried in, and apparently she was more interested in this than in what our friends were doing. The mat was finished as darkness began to creep up the hillside, and Betty spread thereupon the food I had snatched from the cabin table. There was a piece of sausage, three slices of bread, and a can of sardines.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "we had better save some for the morrow."

"I refuse to save," she retorted, chin in air. "Poor we may be, sir; but never shall it be said that we stinted ourselves in the matter of rich and nourishing sustenance.

Pray, sir, draw up before it gets too dark to distinguish the varied viands."

"This is prodigal conduct," I protested, as she divided the food equally and passed my share to me. "What of tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow you will get more birds. and if you do not, you will get something else. And if you don't get that—Sir! I refuse to worry about anything so sordid as food. Now if it were a matter pertaining to higher things—Oh! Aren't these sardines delicious!"

And when the scanty meal was finished she leaned back with a mock air of repletion and said—

"Now, let come what may; I have dined."

"Do you feel so brave?" I asked.

"Yes sir. As brave as beseems one who has dined sumptuously."

"Joking aside, do you feel brave enough to spend an hour or two in this dark cave —alone?"

"Is it necessary?" she asked after making sure that I was not joking. "What are you going to do?"

"We must try to learn what's been going on today. As soon as it is thoroughly dark I propose to sneak back to the cabins. If I have good luck I may be able to get a word with Dr. Olson, or George. Then we'll know if it's necessary or advisable for us to remain hidden underground."

"I'm sure it is," she said swiftly and with conviction.

"Why are you sure?"

"I don't know; I feel it."

"It may be well enough," said I, "but I don't feel it's right of us to lie here without making a move. If our friends can't help us we ought to know, so we may plan to help ourselves."

"If you have decided upon it, I suppose you will go."

"Not unless you give your consent."

"My consent?"

"Yes. You don't think I'd go away and leave you here alone in the cave if you tell me you'd be afraid?"

"I shall be afraid," she said soberly. I looked at her a little disappointed. "I shall be afraid every minute until your return that something may happen to you. And then," she added lightly, "who would get birds for my breakfast in the morning? Of course you have my consent to go. I'll lie here in my canoe and try to think noble thoughts. But do be careful."

I waited until nine before leaving the cave. It was then pitch-dark in the woods. I had, however, laid out my course in my mind's eye, and set out for the crest of the ridge without hesitation.

My progress at first was nothing to be proud of. I stumbled and fell over unseen rocks and logs, walked smack into sturdy trees, and was tangled in the brush constantly. At the top of the ridge the woods and brush grew thinner. It was practically bare ground here and I traveled the crest swiftly until the odorous dampness of the night air warned me that I was approaching the lake, and I paused sharply.

I was now, I judged, near the spot where I had descended from the ridge to warn Slade and Harris. If I was right, I would soon be able to see the lights from the cabins in the clearing below; and so fearful was I of Brack's devilish shrewdness that I dropped to my hands and knees and crawled noiselessly forward to peer over the ridge.

Apparently my caution was unnecessary. So far as I could see there were no lights in the cabins. In fact, there might have been no cabins there, so absolutely was everything below me sunk in the black night.

Minute after minute passed with my eyes straining in vain for a glimpse of light and my ears listening vainly for some sound of human nearness, but the darkness was no less complete than the silence. Perhaps I had gone wrong. Perhaps that open space below, from whence rose dampness and odor, was not the lake at all, but the bay. More careful appraisal of my surroundings, however, convinced me that my course had been true. That was the lake down there; the cabins were on the farther side; and it being on toward ten o'clock, the candles were out and the doctor, George, and the others, were asleep.

This was the reasoning with which I relieved myself, as I let myself down the ridge toward the clearing. My caution, however, had not deserted me, and my progress was as noiseless as could be.

It was fully half an hour after leaving the top of the ridge before I lay in the brush behind the clearing. The cabin in which Betty and I had left George was before me and probably fifty yards away, but no sound or light hinted that it was inhabited.

The cold shiver which always came to me when I was afraid once more ran up my spine as I contemplated the open space between myself and the cabin. I wished greatly to retreat, so I promptly drove myself forward, pistol in hand, literally dragging myself up to the rear of the squat cabin whose very darkness and silence seemed eloquent with sinister possibilities.

Beneath the open window through which Betty and I had fled I lay with my head against the logs, listening for the sounds of breathing within. No such sound came. No sound of any kind came.

I lifted my head until an ear was over the sill of the window. It was so still that a man's breathing, or the ticking of a watch, could not have escaped my strained hearing. I thrust my head inside the room. Now by its complete silence I knew that the room was empty, and I drew myself up slowly and clambered in.

After a while I struck a match. The room was bare. The bunks, blankets, chairs, dishes, the table, the stove, all had been removed. The floor and walls were bare.

I went to the other cabin, where the wounded men had lain. Then I sat down on the nearest threshold, weak and numbed. The cabins were empty. Brack had removed our friends beyond our ken. We were deserted. But more sinister than that; the cabins had been stripped of their last morsel of food, of everything that might have been of assistance to us in maintaining existence in the wilderness.

XXXII

I SAT there in the cabin doorway for a long time, the props upon which I had builded hope and confidence suddenly knocked away. George was gone; Dr. Olson was gone. And there was no trace of them left behind, no trace of where they had gone, or why, or how. They had disappeared from our ken. We were out of touch with them. And upon them had been built our hopes.

Far off on some hilltop a wolf barked suddenly. I pictured Brack with his sneering eyes laughing at me. It was all his work, of course. If it had not been—if the abandonment of the cabins had been accidental—Dr. Olson, knowing that I would return there sometime, would have managed to leave a note or sign to tell the why and where of the going.

But the captain, also knowing that we would come back to the cabins, had taken proper precautions. There was no note, no sign. There was no hope, no chance to escape him. That was the lesson he had prepared for us with these empty cabins.

The wolf barked again, and I thought of Betty alone in the cave and sprang up. And there was something selfish in the speed with which I traveled back over the ridge, for the nearness of her was a stay to my waning confidence and courage.

Nearing the cave I moved more cautiously, not wishing to blunder through the mask of brush we had made to hide the opening. Fumbling in the darkness I found the overhanging rock, and then the opening which I had left as a door in the brush. I paused a moment before crawling inside, and as I did so Betty's voice came faintly from the canoe:

"Is that you, Gardy? And are you all right?"

"I am," I replied, as I entered. "And you?"

"Fine and dandy. But—oh, you were away an awful long time."

"Yes. It was farther than I thought."

"And did you see George? And what did you find out?"

"A lot of things," I mumbled with assumed sleepiness. "Everything's all right. No need to worry. But I'm so tired, so sleepy I can't talk now. Forgive me, but I'll have to wait until morning before telling about it."

"You poor boy!" I heard her sit up.

"Oh, I'm all right," I protested as I lay down on my nest of boughs. I was sitting up an instant later. "Here; what's this? You've put the blanket on my bed."

"Only half of it. I ripped it in two while you were gone. It wasn't fair——"

"You're going to take it back."

"No, sir. I'm as warm as a cat back here. I'll never forgive you if you make me take it back after my feeling so noble for giving it to you. So there."

"Now really——"

"No, sir! You lie right down and cover yourself up and get the sleep you need so much. You wouldn't deprive me of feeling like a heroine, would you? Of course not. Good night."

"Good night."

She chuckled softly as she lay down.

"I called you 'Gardy,' Mr. Pitt; did you notice that? Shocking, isn't it? After a few days' acquaintance. I wonder—I wonder if cave-people ever had more than one name."

And after awhile her soft, steady breathing as she slept made me glad I had withheld the bad news for the morrow.

I AWOKE the next morning at the first gray light of dawn and slipped out while Betty still slept. I was now as eager to find some sign of human nearness as the morning before I had been eager to assure myself of the isolation of our hiding-place. A sight of the yacht, of any one, of Brack even, would have been a relief from the growing sensation that we had been left completely alone.

I went down to the bay and followed its indentations for more than a mile, making no effort at concealment, in another fruitless search for the yacht. I went over the ridge to the cabins and stood in the clearing before them and shouted recklessly. And when the hills had mockingly echoed back my futile shouts, I knew the calmness of resignation to the worst. We were alone, and we must exist, and escape, if escape we could, solely by our own efforts.

I gathered a pocketful of stones and half a dozen clubs and went back to our spring to hunt for grouse. My good fortune of the day before was not to be repeated. Birds in plenty there were. They flushed from beneath my feet, flew past my head, and sat in rows on branches and looked down upon me. I found, however, that it is one thing to hurl a club into a covey huddled under a bush, and quite another to knock a bird out of a tree, and in desperation I finally used the pistol to bring down the single bird which I thought was to comprise our breakfast that morning.

In the primitive morning stillness the noise of the shot was like a crack of lightning, splitting the silence and echoing through the hills. But by this time I was convinced that we were alone there in Kalmut Valley, and that no one was near enough to hear the report.

As I reentered the cave Betty sprang up, asking:

"Well? Who and what did you see at the cabins last night?"

While I sought for a way to break the news without any unnecessary alarm to her she continued:

"It's bad news, of course. I felt that last night. You'd never have been sefish enough to go to sleep without telling me if the news had been good. What is it, Mr. Pitt?"

"I am sorry to say that I didn't see any one at the cabins," I replied. "There was no one there. There was nothing there. The cabins were stripped bare. Everything in them was gone—food, everything."

"Then thank goodness for the bird," she said quietly. "Where do you think George and everybody, and everything has gone?"

"Oh, Brack's taken them and all the stuff away some place. But where I can't imagine. I really don't believe the yacht's in the fiord at all, so it doesn't seem they could be on board. Brack may have headquarters somewhere on shore."

"But what could be his object in taking everything away from the cabins?"

"To leave us without food or anything to help us."

"Hm," said Betty, her chin in her hands. "I was thinking of something else."

"What?"

"Brack knew you'd go back and have a look at the cabins. He thinks we're in the open wilderness without a shelter over our heads. Well, when you find that the cabins have been stripped, deserted, apparently abandoned for good, wouldn't it be natural for us to rush to them for shelter?"

"Certainly."

"Well, couldn't he be watching, and when we were in—" her hand pounced onto a sprig of birch and crushed it—"just like that?"

"A trap!" I cried. "I never thought of that. Of course. And with no food, even if we were safe at first, we'd have to give in in the end."

"Which we'll never, never do, of course," she said firmly. She looked around at the fir and birch boughs hung in the cave. "I don't think I care to move just at the present. While this apartment is not as roomy or light as it might be, I am quite fascinated with its interior decorations, as well as its safety. No; Mr. Brack must find other tenants for his cabins. I think we shall remain right here."

I laughed in sheer relief at the serio-comic air with which she said this.

"Betty," I said, "aren't you even a little bit afraid?"

"Oh, yes, Gardy," she said, instantly

serious. "Aren't you? I'm lots afraid. But we mustn't let that bother us, must we?"

"Emphatically, no! We mustn't let anything bother us. You mustn't let anything worry you. We'll get along, somehow; I don't know how, but I know we will——"

"Of course we will!"

"And when it comes to Captain Brack——"

"Are we downhearted?" demanded Betty, and together we answered: "No!"

It was immediately after this that we once more saw the captain. I was preparing to go out and clean the bird, and as I parted the branches a boat from the yacht, rowed by four men, with Brack at the rudder, came rushing down the fiord and steered for the beach directly below where we were hidden.

Betty saw me start and sprang to my side. Neither of us said a word while we watched the boat come to land. As the men sprang out and hurried into the brush we drew back to the rear of the cave, sat down on the canoe, and looked at each other.

"It's my fault," I whispered. "I shouldn't have fired that shot. They heard it. Don't give up, though. They haven't found us yet."

"I wonder if they are coming here?" she whispered back.

I went back to the opening and peered cautiously through the branches. The men, even Captain Brack, were crouched down in the shelter of a huge boulder, and Brack was giving them directions.

Immediately they scattered, and began to work up the hill. They did not come directly toward the cave but went slightly to the north, in the direction where I had fired my pistol.

The caution with which they moved puzzled me. They crouched and ran from tree to tree, keeping in cover as much as possible, peering around carefully, their rifles always ready. Brack brought up the rear. The other men appeared almost frightened and it seemed that only his presence drove them forward.

"They're searching the hill, but they're not coming in this direction," I whispered as I drew back to Betty. "Apparently they don't know the exact location of this cave."

"Do you think they will find it?"

"How can I tell? It's wonderfully hidden."

"If they do find it, what will you do?"

I did not reply. I did not know what I would do. But one thing I did know: Brack would not lead us away as his prisoners.

"Gardy," she whispered, "if they are going to find us tell me, because there's something I've got to tell you if—if—anything happens."

"Nothing is going to happen to you," I whispered assuringly. "Be easy on that. Nothing will happen to you."

"Even if they do find us?"

"Even if they do find us. Hush now. We'd better not even whisper."

We sat waiting in silence, our eyes upon the brush-mask across the cavern's mouth. We were cornered. There was nothing to do but sit and wait for what fate might allot us. Each second I expected to see a face peering through the brush, and to hear the shout that would announce our discovery. But the seconds, infinitely long and throbbing, passed and became minutes, and still we had no sign of Brack and his men.

It was at least half an hour after the men had started up the hill that a spruce grouse, flushed from the ground, flashed across the opening, so close that its wings touched the brush. By the rising flight of the bird I knew that it had been flushed but a few yards away, and, I judged, by some one who was coming toward the cave. They would be here soon now.

XXXIII

"LIE down in the canoe," I whispered to Betty. "They must have missed us; I'm going to take a little look."

When she had obeyed, and could not see what I did, I slipped the safety catch off my pistol and crept forward to the mouth of the cave.

I was right; some one was walking near the cave. After a few seconds I could make out the heavy footsteps of two men. They were walking carelessly, brush crackling beneath their feet, and they were coming down-hill. Suddenly from some distance off came the sound of a sharp whistle twice repeated. The footsteps stopped.

"There," said a voice. "Wha' d' I tell you? The cap's given up, too, and it's a case of get back to the boat for us."

"I tell you," responded a second voice, "I don't believe it was the guys we're after at all. They're old-timers and wise guys. It don't seem nach'rel they'd go shooting this close to the water, where they knew we'd be sure to hear it. That was a revolver, too."

"Who the —— else would it be, then?" demanded the first man. "There ain't nobody else to do any revolver shooting round here, is they? Sure it was the guys we're after. Nobody else. They're hard up fer grub, and had to shoot something wherever they could get it—nobody else 'round here."

"There's that —— Pitt, an' the skirt the cap's gone crazy about, ain't there? They're loose somewhere in the valley, too, ain't they?"

"Sure. They got no revolver, though. He ain't a shootin' man, either. Naw; it was those miner guys who fired that shot, all right; an' they're old-timers an' beat it like —— right away an' kept traveling, so we didn't find them or their trail. They might be layin' round here some place at that."

"Well, come on. Let's get down."

Their footsteps sounded again on the ground. I placed my eyes to an interstice in the brush and peered out. Perhaps fifty feet north of the cave two of Brack's men were slouching down-hill toward the boat, their rifles hanging carelessly over their shoulders like men who are returning from an unsuccessful hunt.

Farther down the hill and a good distance to the north were two other men, and as I watched Brack broke out of the brush along the bay and ran swiftly down the beach to where his boat lay tied. Here he dropped promptly out of sight behind the boulder where he and his men had sought shelter when they landed, and there, safely hidden, he awaited the return of his men.

His tactics puzzled me at first. Why did he run so swiftly across the open space of the beach? Why hide himself behind the boulder? It was not like Brack to run or hide. Then, considering the speech I had just heard, I understood. It was Slade and Harris that Brack and his men had come hunting, summoned by my pistol-shot, and the captain, knowing their deadly skill with the rifle, was not wishful to expose himself any more than was necessary.

"Betty," I said swiftly, as the men came out upon the beach and tumbled into the boat, "they're going away. It wasn't us they were after. They've no idea we're here. They're rowing away now, and I'm going to try and see if I can't follow them and find where they're staying."

They were shoving the boat out now, and as soon as they had turned its bow toward the head of the fiord, I leaped from the cave and ran as swiftly as I could northward, keeping out of sight of the water. When I knew that I was well ahead of the boat I curved toward the fiord, and the moment the water came in view I lay flat down in the brush and waited. If the boat did not appear I would at least know that Brack's rendezvous was somewhere between the cave and the point where I was lying.

I had but a minute or two to wait, however, when the boat came rushing along and continued farther north. Once more I waited until it was out of sight, then again curving my path out of sight of the water, I once more ran desperately to get in the lead.

My rush this time led me to where I found further progress barred by the river at the head of the fiord. At the junction of the two waters I hid myself and waited. When the boat came in view I drew back, for I was perilously near the river and I judged that having come this far Brack was bound up the river toward the cabins. I was mistaken. The boat turned eastward, before reaching the river-mouth. It went straight toward an opening on the other side of the fiord which I had not previously noticed. This opening was to some degree hidden by an out-jutting bluff. Without slacking speed the boat swung around the bluff and disappeared into a part of the fiord whose existence I had not suspected.

Then I stood up and cursed aloud. And at that a voice cried out from a clump of willows near by:

"Oh ——! Is that really you, Brains? Oh, ——! Mebbe I ain't glad to see you!"

Pierce's expression as he came stumbling out of the willows was a study. The last two days had wrinkled and drawn his honest face into a mask of despair, and now, suddenly convulsed with relief and joy, his eyes honestly shed tears while his lips grinned happily.

"Put 'er there, Brains! Mitt me, mitt me!" he stammered, grasping my hand. "Gee! I didn't know you with all that fuzz on your face. Well, you're all right, and—and there ain't anything happened to Her, has they?"

"No, Freddy," I managed to say at last. "Miss Baldwin is all right. She's back in the cave that I told you about."

"Wow!" He fairly wilted with relief. "Say, if anything had happened to her I'd hike straight back to the yacht and blow a hole through Brack's head the second I saw him."

"The yacht?" I cried. "Do you mean to say the yacht is near at hand?"

"Right up at the end of the bay there," was his casual reply. "Riordan ran 'er up right after you'd left that afternoon with the boss. Say, how long ago is that, Brains?"

"Two days ago, isn't it?"

"Yah! You ain't sure yourself, are you? It's been long for you, too, eh? Seems about a month to me. An' you been living in the cave! Say! Look at this." He patted the sweater which he was wearing and which was swollen far out in front.

"Grub," he said. "Come on; let's beat it before anybody comes nosing around."

"Pierce!" I said, "do you mean to say that you've got food—real, civilized food there?"

"Sure. I was on my way to the cave to feed you. Wait a second while I get my rifle."

He dove back into the willows and reappeared bearing the rifle which I had taken from Barry.

"Come on. Lead the way. Tell you all about it later. Got to beat it now. I put a bump on Garvin's bean to get away and they may be after me any minute. Go ahead, fast's you can; I'll keep up."

I WAITED to ask no more questions but plunged into the forest at a run with Pierce following at my heels. There was no need for caution now and we went straight to the cave, to find Betty ruefully picking the bird I had shot. At the sight of Pierce she stopped and stared, while I took the bird from her hand.

"No need for this now," I laughed. "Here's Freddy, and he's brought us some real civilized food."

"Best I could do," said Pierce, and opening his belt there clattered to the floor of the cave a quantity of the *Wanderer's* choicest viands that made me gasp. "Wilson's sweater," explained Pierce, looking at the pile. "Big enough for two of me. Held quite a lot, didn't it?"

"Food!" Betty clasped her hands and gazed in amazement at the collection.

There was potted turkey, *pâté-de-foie-gras*, asparagus tips, veal-loaf, all in glass. There were packages of tea biscuit. There was a bundle which contained sandwiches.

"Food! Oh, you blessed, perambulating pantry! You—you angel!" she cried, and hugged Pierce in a way that left him red and stammering.

"Gee! Beg pardon—I mean, you're all right, ain't you, Miss Baldwin? Gee—I mean, that's fine!"

"Freddy," said I with genuine feeling, "as you say, 'mitt me,' once more. 'Put 'er there.' You're a prince. You're more than a prince; you're a clever man."

"Aw, c'm on now, Brains; don't go kidding me," he protested.

"Kidding you!" cried Betty, biting into a generous sandwich. "If you knew how we felt toward you at this moment—if you knew how like an angel you appear to us! Oh, but real food does taste good!"

"I ought to have got here before this," said Pierce, as Betty and I devoted ourselves to nourishment, "but first Riordan had me locked in the engine-room, and then Brack had me there, and this was the first chance for a getaway I had."

"Begin at the beginning," I commanded, opening the asparagus. "We don't know a thing except that when we came back the other night the yacht was gone."

"And roll yourself a cigaret, do," supplemented Betty.

"Aw—aw, I guess I can get along without smoking," said Pierce lamely.

"Roll a cigaret," repeated Betty. "Then tell us—about everything. And how is George—Mr. Chanler?"

XXXIV

"THE boss is all right," was Pierce's prompt response, as he began to manufacture his cigaret. "Yes, sir, he's all right, but he ain't letting Brack know it. He's a reg'lar guy, the boss is, after all."

"Of course," I said. "But begin at the beginning."

"All right."

He blew a puff of smoke toward the opening of the cave, fanned it away from Betty, and began:

"The first thing that happened after you and the boss went up the bay, Mr. Pitt, was for little Freddy to slip into the water and go after his rifle, here. I did a dive when Riordan was taking a lunch, got up here, got the gun and got back on board before he knew I'd been gone. I hid the gun in the oil locker, back of the tanks where nobody could see it. I got through just in time, too, 'cause pretty soon Riordan comes on deck and orders me down to start the auxiliary engine, while he and the nigger gets up the anchor.

"I start her all right, but I says to myself if Riordan turns her nose out to sea I'll get my gun and start a little mutiny all by my lonesome. Well, he don't do nothing of the sort; just starts right up the bay, running on the auxiliary. I think that's all right, because of course I knew it was the cap's orders, and we was going up the same way you went. Then after awhile we anchored, and then I knew it wasn't all right, because I tried the engine-room door and Riordan had me locked in tight.

"The cap let me out himself in the morning, because Doc' Olson had told him he wanted me to help him with the boss and the two guys that was shot."

"Shot!" cried Betty. "Who was shot?"

"The two seamen that Dr. Olson said were hurt," I said hurriedly. "Never mind now. Go on, Freddy."

"The doc' just got me out to get a chance to slip me the news about you and where you'd gone; but there wasn't any chance for a getaway 'cause Brack was there, and Garvin was on guard all the time with his gun. Doc sent me running first to the boss and then to Wilson and the two other guys with dope and drinks, and so on, and pretty soon the boss got his noodle working and starts framing things."

"Chanler began to think out a plan," I translated to Betty.

"Eh-yah," continued Freddy unabashed. "It was the boss that framed it all up. He's a reg'lar guy. 'Tell Wilson to pretend to be worse,' says he. 'I'll do the same.' Wilson was fit to get up, but the boss says, no; he and Wilson were to be like they was helpless. Then the boss says to Brack he'd give him any sum he'd name if he'd sail out of there and take him home."

"What?" said Betty. "George wanted to leave us?"

"Naw! You don't understand. Naw, I should say not he didn't want to leave anybody. I told you he was a reg'lar guy. And there with the brains, too. He was just playing up to Brack. But cappy says he couldn't think of leaving without—well, you know; he's a pretty wicked guy."

"I understand," said Betty quietly. "Well?"

"So the boss pretended to have a fit, and did a lot of fancy stalling. You see now, don't you: the boss is putting cappy off his guard and laying for a chance to jump the bunch and get control of the yacht."

"But, great heavens!" I expostulated. "They've no arms, and they're outnumbered."

"Well, they ain't outnumbered so bad," said Pierce. "There's the boss, and Wilson, and Doc Olson, and Simmons, and the big nigger. Oh, yes; we got the nigger with us. I know he wanted to get Garvin, and felt him out. He's only waiting to be turned loose."

"It's impossible," said I. "Brack and his men are armed to the teeth."

"That's the trouble. If we'd had a gun apiece there'd been something doing this morning while the cap was away. But the cap's cleaned the boat of guns and got 'em in his possession, 'cept one Doc' Olson copped off one of the men who was shot. So Wilson told me what to do, and I sneaked an iron bar into his room and two into the boss's, one for him and one for Simmons, and the nigger's got a knife down one pants leg and a club down the other. When the chance comes they're going to try to put cappy out of business while the nigger gets Garvin. The rest of 'em don't amount to much. The trouble is the chance don't come.

"The boss was worried about you last night. He said we'd have to try to get some grub to you since we didn't have a chance to get the yacht. The last thing he says to me last night was, 'Remember, we've got to get some grub to 'em tomorrow no matter what happens to us.'

"Well, when the cap went away this morning after he heard that shot, he set Barry to watching the boss and Simmons, and Doc' all in the boss's room. Garvin was set to doing a watch aft, and Riordan was set to pacing the deck to watch everything in general. The two guys who was hurt had guns, too. I knew Barry'd get the boss if we tried to start anything, so I just put on Wilson's sweater and stuffed it full of food, and got my gun and waited for a chance to get away without being seen. But there was Garvin aft, near the shore I wanted to make, and Riordan doing the rounds. But I remembered what the boss'd said about getting you grub, and when Riordan was forward I took a chance.

"Garvin turned around just as I was getting ready to clout him and he got the butt right in the temple. Then I did a dive, and if I'd had ten feet farther to swim it would have been a 'good-by Freddy,' because the grub and rifle was pretty heavy, and Riordan took one shot at me just as I made the brush. Then I hiked it and swam the river, and I was hiding when you stood up and swore at cappy."

"Did you swear?" demanded Betty, turning to me. "Did you really swear at him? Oh, I'm so glad; I was afraid you never did it."

"And don't you worry," concluded Freddy, "the boss is all there and wide awake, and there ain't going to be any fall-down: when the chance comes he'll put the trick over and we'll be out of the woods. He's just living for that now."

And Betty and I said as one—

"Good old George!"

"There's only one thing worrying me," resumed Freddy, peering out apprehensively. "The cap'll be wise that I made a getaway to join you, and he'll see my tracks where I crossed the river and come this way looking for the bunch of us."

"That's nothing to worry about," I assured him. "Two of his men were within fifty feet of the cave a short time ago and didn't see it."

"What I'm worrying about," said Betty, "is that you left George."

"Hah? The boss? Why, how could I get the grub to you without leaving him? And he says we got to do that no matter what happened to us."

"We could have got along without the food," Betty continued, "and by leaving the yacht you weakened George's plan. If he attempts to overcome Brack now he—why, he may be in danger of his life."

"Sure thing. That's understood. The boss knows that, but that ain't what's worrying him, not at all. If he can fix things right with you, that's all he cares about. He told me so."

"Chanler is himself again," I said. "You remember I said he would be."

Betty sat with her chin in her hands, thinking. Her eyes were turned in my direction, but she was seeing beyond me without noticing my presence. Suddenly she spoke the words that brought upon us the great crisis.

"I won't have George risking his life on my account. I can't bear that. I won't have it."

XXXV

FOR a moment after she spoke I experienced a sensation as if the sound, comfortable earth had dropped away from beneath me, a sensation of a great fall into a void. Then followed the impression that after all, Betty was a stranger; that I did not know her at all.

"I won't have George risking his life for me," she repeated quietly. "I—I'll go back on board before that."

I went from cold to warm. Freddy tried to speak and I silenced him with a look. When I spoke, my voice was hoarse and heavy.

"Miss Baldwin, you will not go aboard until Brack is beaten, and the yacht is in our possession. I am responsible to Chanler for your safety."

There followed a trying period of silence.

"Why—why, Mr. Pitt!" Betty finally tried to laugh, but the grimness of my expression must have convinced her that laughter was out of place. "That was the first rude speech you have made. Do you realize how rude it was?"

I did not speak. Her solicitude for George had awakened in me an anger, adamite and smoldering, which grew with each minute. George must not risk his precious life! Freddy had risked his. I had risked mine. But George must be protected at all costs! And why? Why, because he meant so much to her that the lives of others, and her own safety, were insignificant in comparison? I made an attempt to smile.

"Mr. Pitt! Gardy!" she cried, shrinking. "Don't look at me that way. What are you going to do?"

"I beg your pardon; I didn't realize that I was looking at you in an offensive manner."

"What—are you—going—to—do?"

I looked at the ground. It did not take me long to make my plans. I said—

"I'm going to pray that it's a very dark night."

From that moment the hearty camaraderie which had existed between us was gone. We seemed to have been moved far apart. Betty once more was Miss Baldwin; I was not Gardy, but Mr. Pitt. She literally drew away from me and from a distance cast puzzled glances in my direction.

Then we became formally polite to one another. When we spoke it was as if we had been but recently introduced, and we spoke only when it was necessary. And Freddy wrinkled his freckled forehead and glanced from Betty to me, frankly puzzled.

It was a long day for us all in the cave. When darkness finally began to fall we greeted it with relief. Freddy, peering out at the darkening sky, said:

"Well, your prayers have been answered all right: it's going to be dark enough to suit anybody. Now put me next, Brains; what's your stunt?"

"Brack doesn't know that I've got this pistol," I said.

"What of it?"

"As he thinks I'm unarmed—helpless—he won't be on his guard—when I go aboard tonight."

"Oh!" It was Betty who exclaimed, but she smothered the exclamation with her hand.

"What you going to do when you get on board?" asked Pierce.

"You'll stay here with Miss Baldwin," I continued, paying no attention to his query. "If everything goes as I hope, George will come down and bring you to the yacht."

It was dark now and I prepared to leave.

"Hold on," said Pierce. "What's the use of your going swimming in that cold water? You'd have to swim the river, and then out to the yacht, and by the time you go on board you'd be so cold and stiff you wouldn't be any good. Tell you what let's do; let's paddle up in the canoe, you 'n' me. It's so dark they'd never see us. Then you can get on board, warm and supple, and fit to do something."

There was much sense in his argument, and after discussing it for awhile I agreed to it. Brack, of course, must not suspect Pierçe's presence.

"As soon as I go over the side you're to paddle off and be ready to return to Miss Baldwin."

"Sure. Anything you say, Brains."

"Thank you," said Betty stiffly, "but there will be no need for you to come back here for me. Mr. Pitt, just as surely as you go away without me I'll leave this cave and go to the yacht alone. I mean it. I will not be left here. You can take me in the canoe, too. I will be as safe as Mr. Pierce."

"You will stay right here," said I.

"Will I!" she slipped past me, bounded through the brush, and stood outside the cave, ready to run. "I can find the yacht. You can't catch me. Now, Mr. Pitt, what shall it be?"

Pierce promptly relieved the situation.

"We can land her at some point up there. That'll be all right, won't it?"

"Ask her," I said.

"Yes; that will be all right," she replied promptly.

WITH this understanding we carried the canoe down to the water, and with Betty in the middle, started up the fiord. As Pierce said, my prayers for a dark night seemed to have been answered.

So complete was the darkness that twice we grounded, having run into land which we were not able to see. The sound of the river current warned us when we had reached the head of the bay, and carefully following the shore we glided through the opening where I had seen Brack's boat disappear.

"There—there she is, right ahead of us," whispered Pierce, and in the inchoate darkness we made out a series of tiny lights, the gleam from the *Wanderer's* cabin windows.

"She's laying bows out with her stern near the shore on our port," whispered Pierce as we backed water and lay still. "Her starboard's toward us. There's one ladder down at the stern and one at the bow, port side. Better take the bow one; the cap's more'n likely to be aft. And there's a good place to land Miss Baldwin, right here."

We lay without moving or speaking for many long, distressful seconds.

"Mr. Pitt," whispered Betty finally, "do you insist on going through with your mad plan?"

"Yes."

We were silent again.

"All right," said Betty.

Pierce silently moved the canoe to the shore on our port side, the shore toward which the *Wanderer's* stern was turned, and without a word Betty stepped out.

"Pierce will come back here as soon as he sees me go over the side," I whispered.

She made no reply. Then we paddled silently away, steering for the *Wanderer's* bow.

I was conscious now of nothing but a spirit of elation. There was not a pang, not a fear in my thoughts. The old fright-chill along the spine, which hitherto always had come to me when approaching danger, was gone. I was like a boy turned loose for a holiday. All the considerations which cause men to fear danger I had put away. All the responsibilities which hold men to a cautious rôle in life had gone from me. My responsibility toward Betty would be discharged when I had removed for her the danger of Brack. And Betty cared so much for George Chanler that she wouldn't have him risk his life for her, and consequently there was no reason why anything in the world mattered much to me.

"Faster!" I whispered, digging viciously at the water. "Hurry up; I want it over with."

"Easy, Brains, easy."

Pierce silently backed water. We were four or five lengths from the *Wanderer's* starboard side, and though we were invisible in the darkness the lights and white paint of the yacht revealed her outlines and superstructure.

"There's a boat in the water at the stern," whispered Freddy. "Mebbe it'd be a good thing to cut her loose in case we have to make a getaway."

"Cut nothing loose," I whispered contentedly. "Move up to the bow ladder and let's have it over with quickly."

He took a stroke forward then backed again.

"Hey! There he is; walking aft. See him? By the last light aft."

"Yes," I breathed, as I made out Captain Brack's figure where Pierce had indicated. "Now hurry and put me aboard, and I may surprise him."

The canoe moved forward again. Pierce paddled in a semi-circle, heading away from the *Wanderer's* side and curving back toward the bows. The yacht was all dark forward, save from a single gleam from a port-hole in George's stateroom. Leaning well forward in the canoe I held my hands thrust out before me, and presently my finger-tips rested against the *Wanderer's* sharp bow.

"Here's the ladder—right here," whispered Pierce. I moved the canoe backwards with my hands, and presently held the rope rungs of the ladder in my grasp. I reached up high above my head and gripped a rope rung firmly.

"Now hurry back to Miss Baldwin," I whispered, and swung myself up.

Pierce did not answer at once.

"Do you hear?" I demanded.

"Oh, sure."

I was well up the ladder then, but his tone prompted me to turn and look down. Pierce, with his rifle under one arm, was tying the canoe to the ladder, When, looking up, he saw that I had stopped and observed him he started guiltily, then leaped resolutely onto the ladder below me.

"Get off! Go back to the girl!" I commanded.

"I won't," said he. And we were hanging so, against the yacht's sides, when Betty's voice called softly from the shore beyond the stern:

"Oh, Captain Brack! Quick, please. I'm tired and afraid. Hurry, hurry! Take me aboard at once!"

XXXVI

A MOMENT of silence followed, silence as complete as the darkness of the night. On the ladder Pierce and I hung as if frozen to the rungs. The tone of Betty's call seemed to permeate the air; its pleading, compelling notes lingered like a perfume. Oh, the power of woman! The might of so slight a part of her as the nuances of her speech! For the call of Betty was a command. Nay, it was a force, a law, as indubitable as the law of gravity. It was surcharged with the thrill and power of Nature's will. It was Woman. And Brack would go. He must go, in response to it. And Betty knew it.

Brack's laugh, short and excited, sounded aft.

"Ah! Yes, yes; one minute." His voice was exultant. "I'm coming."

He must have leaped at the last words, for instantly there was a clatter as he dropped into the boat. Then the creak of an oar as he swung the boat clear.

"Where are you, Miss Baldwin?" he laughed.

And then, when it was too late, I recovered from the shock that had congealed me. I cried out, an involuntary, agonized cry, and as if in response a man come running swiftly to the ladder and peered over the rail.

"Who's dere; who is it? Speak, or I'll shoot!"

Head and voice I recognized as one of the most vicious of Brack's men, and it was too late to attempt to retreat.

"It's Mr. Pitt," said I, and climbed upward.

"Hold on; stop right dere."

I had thrown one leg over the guard rail. The man was a yard away, a revolver pointed at my chest.

"'S all right, Joe." From below the quick-witted Freddy sent up a reassuring growl. "'S all right; let 'im go."

"Hah?" The seaman, startled, bent forward to look, and I leaped, sinking both hands into his throat and bearing him to the rail.

In the same second Pierce seemed to be on the rail. His rifle rose over his head and came down on my man's arm, knocking the revolver from his hand.

"The gun—the gun! Get his gat'!" whispered Freddy.

I had it even as he spoke, and with a weapon in each hand I ran aft, madly, unthinkingly, wishful only to follow whither Captain Brack had gone. Riordan was the first man I met, and as he retreated at the sight of me and tugged at his hip pocket, I struck at him, saw him fall, and went on with scarcely a pause.

I heard Freddy pounding at George's stateroom, but I ran past. Garvin leaped at me from aft the main cabin. I fired twice at his right arm and heard his weapon clatter on the deck.

On the after-deck Barry caught me about the hips and threw me down, the violence of the fall throwing my weapons from my hands. I was beneath him and the man was trying to stab me as I hugged him tight to my breast. I felt the knife enter my thigh. Barry was the stronger, and I cried out a curse of despair.

"Hang tough for a jiffy, sir," came Wilson's calm voice from a companionway. He, too, was fighting. I heard the sound of two bodies falling. "Hang tough!"

I put all my strength into a paroxysm of pressure, but Barry managed to cut me once more ere Wilson, hobbling on one leg, came to my relief.

I found myself on my knees feeling ill.

"That's three down," said Wilson.

He was at the rail, pulling the stern sea-ladder up on deck. Vaguely I realized then that Wilson, too, had heard Brack leave the ship. Afterward I learned that he had attacked his guards at the sound of my first shot, which he had thought to come from Dr. Olson's revolver as a signal for the revolt. In that way only had it been possible for him to reach me in time to save my life.

The negro and Garvin were fighting near us, with a stamping and roaring as of two great animals locked in battle. Like the hissing of an over-driven pump came the negro's:

"Got you now; got you now, bad man."

Garvin in turn panted.

"You —— nigger! You —— nigger!"

They whirled from the darkness into the shaft of light from a port-hole. The negro struck with some weapon; the thick glass crashed in splinters. They whirled on, into the dark again.

"Swing him around, Sam, and I'll club him for you," said Wilson quietly, hobbling after them.

"Don' touch 'im!" pleaded the negro. "'Foh Gawd! Don' nobody touch 'im. He's mah meat."

Forward, at George's stateroom, there was a tumult; then cries and shots. The door was locked, and as I came running up, Pierce and Dr. Olson were fighting Riordan, and the man who had detected me on the ladder. In the stateroom George and Simmons were battling to keep their guards from joining the fight on deck.

I leaped upon Riordan from behind and Wilson, with his iron bar, began to beat down the door. Barry had recovered consciousness and with one of my pistols came hurrying forward, dancing around seeking for a chance to shoot one of us.

Pierce was knocked down, and as Barry sprang toward him, Wilson turned, and hurled himself clumsily at the fellow's legs. Barry fell, leaped up, and still holding the revolver, went over the side. The other seaman did likewise at the sight of Wilson, and Riordan, felled by the butt of Dr. Olson's revolver, soon followed his example.

"—— 'im! He copped my rifle, too!" spluttered Pierce, Riordan having snatched the weapon from the deck as he went over the side.

In the cabin cracked a shot and there came a shriek which we knew to be Simmons's. Three of us threw our weight with Wilson's, and the door went in.

George was on his feet, throttling one of the guards over a chair. Simmons lay like a bundle of old clothes in a corner. Near by the other guard, on all fours, strove to rise and fell flat. Wilson's right fist smote George's victim senseless and Chanler stood up, gory and calm.

"They've hurt Simmons bad," he said. "Poor old Simmons. My fault. But I'll pay that devil, Brack, out if I never do anything else as long as I live."

The negro had cornered Garvin in the dining-saloon. These two had ceased to resemble human beings. They were all but naked, and their nakedness was red, with spots of white or black showing through. Garvin was crouching on one side of the table with a knife, and at the sight of the negro's empty hands we sprang to help.

"Don't spoil it, white folks, don't spoil it!" growled the negro, moving toward his victim. "I done got 'im; he's mah meat—mah meat!"

He knocked the knife from Garvin's hand somehow. Then they wrecked the room with their hurtling falling bodies. The roar of battle rose to a crescendo and began to diminish. Garvin was losing.

"Guahd dat do'h!" cried the negro, but it was too late.

Garvin had turned to flee. In a bound he was in the doorway, one more and he was at the rail, and the negro cried in real agony as the bruiser vaulted over into the water.

"You got 'im plenty, Sam," said Freddy.

Wilson was hobbling here and there on deck.

"We've cleared ship, sir," he reported. "Now we've got to hold her."

Then I remembered why I had started aft. I was in a fog. Presently I found myself trying to climb the after rail while a cluster of arms held me back.

"Betty! Brack!" I was muttering. "Over there. Let me go."

"No, no, Gardy, old man. Steady down, Brains; you can't walk the water. Easy, sir, easy."

George, Freddy and Wilson; they were all holding me, pleading with me. They drew me forward toward the staterooms.

Suddenly I tore myself free. The light from the open door of George's room reached up to and illuminated the port bow rail. I had seen a head appear where the ladder reached the deck. It was a small, wet head. Then showed a wet, white face and much wet hair, and finally over the rail came a very wet young woman, pausing bewildered in the glare of light and calling:

"Mr. Pitt! Gardy! Where are you?"

The fog cleared. I was sane again. In the shaft of light Betty Baldwin stood balanced ready to run forward at my response. Her right hand was at her bosom, her head on one side in an attitude of anxious listening, but the darkness hid us from her sight!

There was not one of us but was hideous to behold. Wilson, who had done the most fighting in spite of his wounded leg, was the least damaged and he required water, bandages, and fresh clothes, before being presentable. I closed George's door, leaving the deck in total darkness.

"Everything is all right," I said as quietly as I could. "Now come straight ahead."

I met her in the darkness, caught her wet sleeve and guided her swiftly to the door of her stateroom.

"Go in and shut the door. Quick!"

She obeyed without questioning.

"Where's Captain Brack?" I asked through the keyhole.

"Over there—ashore, I suppose. I slipped into the water and swam out here you know, as soon as I heard him go crashing into the brush where he thought I was."

"You—what? You called—you swam?"

"That was why I called to him, of course," she said. "To get him ashore and slip past him and come aboard. Was it too treacherous to be decent?"

"You—you fooled Captain Brack?" At first the thing seemed impossible. "You fooled Brack!" I laughed wildly because the joke was on the captain.

"Gardy—Mr. Pitt, are you all right? Is——"

"George is all right!" I cried. "Rest easy; he's all right. But stay where you are."

I ran aft to break the news. There was no need for this, however. Brack's boat was even then scraping at our stern.

"Throw down that ladder!" he was

bellowing. "Riordan! You —— swab! The ladder!"

Chanler leaned on the rail and called down into the darkness:

"You lose, cappy, Riordan's overboard, and Wilson is captain. Come aboard, cappy. I promise you that I'll see you hanged if it takes every cent I've got."

"Ah sabe you dat trouble, boss," laughed Black Sam, and fired instantly.

We heard Brack fall on his oars. The boat drifted away out of sight. Then we heard him move again. Presently the sound of a faint laugh came out of the darkness.

"Poor shooting! Pitt, you there?" he called easily.

"Yes," I said, stepping forward.

"My only mistake was in underestimating you, Pitt. One tiny mistake in an otherwise perfect plan. You haven't won yet, but—my compliments, Pitt."

I saw the flash as he fired, a roaring, brain-splitting streak of red, which hurled me like a blast into the pit of oblivion.

XXXVII

OF WHAT took place on board during the rest of that night I had only the vaguest of knowledge. Once I had an indistinct impression of consciousness, such as one may have through the film of opiates. Dr. Olson was explaining to some one that it was a pretty close call, considering that it wasn't going to amount to anything. Brack's bullet had struck me under the angle of the left jaw, had ranged upward through the muscles of the neck and gone out squarely above the occiput.

"Those cuts in his leg will give him more trouble," the doctor was saying.

My next impression was of hearing the same sharp report as had ushered me into unconsciousness. I smiled. My senses had cleared now and I was sure that what I fancied I heard was simply the echo of Brack's shot in my disordered mind.

I sank gratefully back toward the slumber that invited me, and then— *Crack! Crack-crack! Crack-crack-crack!* Up on the after deck a perfect splatter of shots which seemed echoed from a distance, drove the sleepiness from my head.

I opened my eyes and sat up. I was in bed in my own stateroom, and the gray light of dawn was coming through the port-hole. From a distance far off came two more reports, and on the steel plates of the *Wanderer's* after cabin resounded two heavy, dull blows.

I was out of bed and on my feet ere the two shots from our stern spat out their reply. I understood the significance of those sounds now. Brack and his gang were attacking at the first light of dawn, and they had not caught our men napping.

My legs bent weakly under me as I stood up, the thigh which Barry had cut seemed numb and helpless, and my head whirled till I nearly fell. With my hands hugging the wall for support I made my way to the door. I wished to step out on deck, and so, naturally, in my tumbled mental condition it was the door leading into the cabin saloon that I found.

I opened the door but slightly and stopped. Betty was sitting before the door. Her back was toward me, there was a book in her lap and her hair was hanging down her back in the disordered condition of a woman who has kept ceaseless vigil, regardless of appearances, through the night.

Softly as I closed the door she heard and was up in a flash.

"Gardy! Mr. Pitt! Are you up?" she called, her hand on the knob. I had slipped the catch as I closed the door so she could not come in. "Do you want anything? I'll get it for you. You mustn't move, you know. Are you—are you feeling stronger—Mr. Pitt?"

"I am all right," I said.

"Oh! Are you really? Are you able to get up?"

"Certainly." I was flinging a dressing gown about me. "What is happening aft?"

Another volley of shots from the shore was answered from the yacht.

"Brack and his men shot Mr. Wilson, and now they're trying to shoot the rest of us."

"Badly? Is Wilson hurt badly?"

"I don't know. I—I've been sitting here. You—you have been so terribly quiet for such a long time, Mr. Pitt."

"And who's back there? Who's doing the shooting on our side?"

"All of them. Pierce, and the negro, and Dr. Olson, and George."

I opened the door and stepped out.

"Oh! Oh, you mustn't,—Mr. Pitt!

Really you mustn't. Go back—what are you going to do?"

I laughed.

"George mustn't be allowed to risk his life, you know."

She recoiled with a sudden wilting, as a child before an unexpected blow.

"Oh!" she moaned. "Oh! How can you?"

My weakness forced me to clutch the wall for support.

"I can't," I said, "unless you get me some whisky."

She was still shrinking, her hands to her breast, and her face white.

"Oh! I didn't know—I couldn't believe —there was anything like—like this in you."

"Hidden country," I laughed, stumbling along the wall. "There's hidden country in all of us."

My hand was on the door of George's stateroom. I pushed it open. Simmons was lying in George's bed, a horrified expression upon his wooden-like countenance as he viewed his surroundings.

"Not my fault, sir," he apologized as I betrayed surprise at seeing him there. "I was put here, sir; I couldn't help it."

"Glory be, Simmons! You're looking sound."

"Oh, I'm doing nicely, thank you, sir. A bit shot off the bottom of my liver, sir, the doctor says. I'll do, says he, thank you."

A revolver was lying on a table and I picked it up. It was loaded.

"Whisky, Simmons! Where is it? I've got to have some, quick."

He grimaced guiltily.

"I—I had a tiny bottle in my coat, sir. It's lying over there. If the bottle isn't smashed—ah! The master's silver flask, so it was. I—I had a bit of cold, sir, and there was no other bottle——"

I drank the stuff like water. My veins, which had felt empty and slack, seemed to fill with warm blood.

I drank again. My legs stiffened and grew firm. My head was in a whirl, but I had strength enough to move easily now, and I went out of the room with a rush. Betty tried to stop me as I went through the saloon, but I lurched on.

The sound of firing came to me as if from far away. In the whirl of my head it seemed first in one direction then in another. I steadied myself for an instant as I came out on deck. The yacht seemed to be heaving and falling, and presently it felt as if it were whirling in a maelstrom.

Where was the aft? Where was the firing? I held my head to steady it. The firing broke out afresh. There it was! It was in front of me. No, it was behind me. A non-drinker shouldn't take so much whisky. Ah! There it was. I lurched forward, intending to go aft. It was not strange that I should cross the fore-deck on my way aft. Nothing was strange in my present condition. Not even the fact that Brack and Garvin were climbing over the rail at the bow, as I came forward.

I was very steady.

"Hello, Brack."

At the sound of my voice and the sight of the revolver in my hand Garvin gave a spring backward and splashed into the water. Brack smiled and vaulted on to the deck. There was a wound on one side of his head where the negro's bullet had marked him, but he bore himself as confidently and masterful as ever. He had two revolvers in his belt, but as I made ready to shoot him when his hands moved toward them he desisted and smiled again.

"So I didn't quite get you, eh, Pitt? Well, it was pretty dark, though you did step out into the light like an accommodating lamb to the butcher. Well, what are you going to do?"

"Put up your hands."

He looked at me, smiled, and calmly folded his arms across his chest.

"Putting up one's hands is undignified. I do not do so. What are you going to do about it?"

I was nonplussed. Here I was, the victor. I was armed, he was helpless; and yet he had taken the upper hand. What did one do under such circumstances?

"This revolver is loaded, Brack," I warned, but I knew that my speech was futile.

"I know it is: I can see the lead in the cylinder. That doesn't make any difference. To be of any danger to me said loaded revolver must be in the hands of a man who is capable of shooting another man. You can't do that, Pitt; you know you can't. You're too civilized. Try it. Just try it. Pick out a certain spot on me—my forehead, for instance—point the gun at that spot and pull the trigger. Try it. You'll find that it's a very hard thing to do —impossible for you, in fact."

He laughed low.

"No, Pitt, you can't shoot me." With imperceptible movements he began to approach me. "Do you hear me, Pitt: You can't shoot me—you can't shoot me."

Suddenly he stopped. His countenance seemed to break into flame. I heard a light step behind me and understood.

"Go back, Betty!" I said, keeping my eyes on Brack. "Go back!"

I was retreating slowly. For the moment Brack was invincible, he was great! His colossal will was mastering us. With it he was driving me back, helpless in spite of my weapon, and he was holding Betty fascinated to the spot.

"Go back!" My shoulder had touched hers. I turned to look at her.

"Gardy!" she gasped, pointing.

I turned. Brack's mighty spring had carried him on to us, and I sprang between him and Betty. He paid scarcely any attention to me, merely struck with his right arm and smashed me to the deck. Then he had Betty in his arms, kissing her, sweeping her to his breast like a struggling child, and retreating toward the rail, the girl held as a shield before him.

I sprang up and ran toward them. My weapon had been knocked from my hands, and as Brack crouched to spring over the rail with his burden I threw myself on him. He shifted Betty to his left arm and with his right drove me back with a single blow.

"Never fear, Pitt," he laughed, tugging at his revolver, "I don't intend leaving before I've settled you."

I rushed again as his weapon came free. I struck him between the eyes and tore Betty from his grasp. My blow staggered and blinded him for the instant. He was at the rail brushing his hand across his eyes when two rifle reports sounded far across the bay and Brack fell flat on the deck without a struggle.

"But you've got to admit he was game—game as a mad ol' silver-tip," said the patriarchal Slade when a boat had brought him and Harris aboard from the point from which they had shot Brack. "A devil he was, with a twisted laugh, but too game to live if he was licked. Me 'n' Bill we was hiding up in the hills and come down to take a peek when the shooting begun. We see him and the other fellow crawling up the anchor-chains, and Brack was driving the other fellow with a gun.

"We couldn't believe it was him at first; didn't seem any man'd try anything so desp'rit; but when we see you scuffling with him, Mr. Pitt, we knew it was him, and savvied how he'd had his gang to start shooting from the other shore to draw everybody aft so we could take one desp'rit whirl at you. Me 'n' Bill we put the sights on him then, but we was afraid of hitting your young lady. So I prayed a little for a clear shot, and the Lord answered my prayer pretty *pronto*. Amen."

XXXVIII

WHEN the *Wanderer* for days became a hospital ship, for with the end of Brack, his crew, including Garvin and Riordan, fled promptly out of the Hidden Country into the vast Alaskan wilderness that lay beyond the gap in the mountains, and with the sudden release from danger came the inevitable collapse of the wounded members of our company.

Wilson now had a bullet-wound through each leg and another through his great chest, and for the time being was helpless. Pierce told me afterward how Wilson, suddenly shot down on the after-deck, had borrowed a chew from Black Sam and, lying flat on his back, had reloaded the rifles in the fight that followed.

Pierce, now that the excitement of danger was gone, discovered that Riordan's boot had broken one of his ribs in the battle at Chanler's state-room; Black Sam had lost so much blood that he collapsed and was content to sit basking in the sun like a sick bear; and Dr. Olson was a nervous and physical wreck. Only Chanler had escaped disablement. He was scarred and bruised, but he was up and around while the rest of us lay helpless.

Dr. Olson ordered me back to bed and filled me up with opiates. My affair with Brack had not been good for my wounds, and absolute quiet was necessary to repair the damage which had been done to them. Slade and Harris remained on board, making themselves useful with the skill and adaptability of pioneers. And George, in his right mind, and Betty were together.

My days and nights for a space then were a series of semi-lucid moments alternated with nightmares. In the former I was at times conscious that Betty was sitting at my side. Occasionally I caught her studying me anxiously. When I returned her scrutiny she looked away. Next it would be Slade or Harris who was with me, then George. Always there seemed to be some one.

The nightmares were rather trying. Two things ran through them consistently: the sound of Betty's voice as she had cried out passionately for Captain Brack, and the spectacle of Brack dragging her to the rail. Then I would wake up raving and presently some one would be holding me down, urging me to be quiet.

On one of these occasions, after midnight, it was George who held me in bed and soothed me.

"It's all right, Gardy old man; it's all right, I tell you," he was saying. "She's all right; safe and sound asleep in her room."

"Brack—Brack's got her!" I moaned.

"No, no, no! Can't you hear me? She's all right. Gardy! Old man. You know me, don't you?"

I returned to sanity. Chanler was grimly trying to smile.

"What have I been saying?" I gasped.

"Oh, nothing." He tried to pass it off carelessly. "Nothing—nothing at all."

"Tell me."

"Oh, just about Brack and Betty; you thought he'd got her."

He looked away.

"What else?"

"Oh, shut up, Gardy! You were out of your head. D'you s'pose I paid any attention to what you were saying? Now drop that. How are you feeling?"

"Embarrassed," I replied.

"Don't!" he protested. "Don't you do it. It—it wasn't anything like that. It—it was all right. I knew it anyway."

"Knew what?"

He looked at me for a long time. Then he appeared to change the subject.

"Everything's all right, old man. We've come to an understanding, Betty and I. It's all settled as it should be. I've had a lot of time for long talks with Betty." He laughed. "She's opened her heart to me, at last, and told me everything. We—we've been exploring hidden country, Betty and I. Good phrase of Brack's, that."

I raised myself and held out my hand.

"Congratulations, George. I knew it would come out all right."

His brows came down in puzzled, skeptical fashion as he took my hand. There was in his expression a tinge of suspicion, and he smiled as one smiles when humoring a sick man.

"There's hidden country in you, all right, old boy," he said. "You ought to play poker."

More sleep and more nightmares, the latter now complicated by the presence of George. Brack no longer was dragging Betty to the rail; she was standing by George's side; and Brack and I were playing poker. Then at last came the sane untroubled sleep of normal condition, and I awoke one morning ravenously hungry and glad that the sun was bright outside.

"You can join the convalescent squad now," said Dr. Olson, and under the awning on the fore-deck I joined Pierce and Simmons, stretched at ease in luxurious deck-chairs.

"Though it isn't my fault, sir," protested Simmons, "the master is not doing right by himself in putting me here."

I SANK down into my chair and looked over water and hills with the wondering eyes of a man who has come back to the world after a long absence. And I found it good.

The *Wanderer* lay in the same spot where Pierce and I had found her on that dark night, Wilson still being too weak to navigate her and there being nobody else capable of the task. The water about us was blue and still, and the birch and pine of the shores were mirrored in it to the smallest shade and detail. Back from the bay rose the age-old hills, step after step of them, growing higher and higher, until they became the great mountain-range which shut the valley in from the rest of the world. And the sun was so bright that I closed my eyes, and the primal peace soaked me to the bone.

Betty came and went, and George; and they made a splendid pair as they rounded the decks on their promenade. They went canoeing together, and Old Slade swore, and we agreed with him, that "there couldn't be no purtier sight than that on God's green earth."

Then George would join us under the awning, and Slade and Harris and he would talk over the development of their property. For George was going in partnership with them. The free pay dirt of their mine was about played out and machinery and labor to tear the hills to pieces were necessary for the further working of the find.

"And what about the bones up at Petroff Sound?" I asked.

"No use—not necessary now," George replied. "Besides, this is easier, and nearer to Fifth Avenue, and these last days have been so strenuous that I'm about filled up."

I thought over what he said.

Not necessary to go to Petroff Sound now. No, of course not. Betty had decided that gold-mining was more fun. And why go on to Petroff Sound when they had already come to an understanding.

George did not display quite the elation he should have done under the circumstances, I thought; but he was so blasé that even the winning of Betty wouldn't keep him animated for long.

Betty finally came and sat with us. She talked to Pierce, to Simmons, and to me; and at me she looked with puzzlement in her quiet gray eyes and bit her under lip and looked away.

"Do you feel so completely a stranger to me?" she whispered, drawing her chair near to mine.

"Like a stranger?" I said. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because you look at me as if—as if we were just speaking acquaintances."

"I didn't know," I apologized. "I'll do better. You," I continued, looking at her, "don't look as happy as I expected you would."

"One doesn't," she whispered, rising to go, "when one's in a hidden country and nobody will help one out."

"Help you out?" I whispered, but she was gone.

I wearied my brains in vain puzzling over her meaning; but that evening Dr. Olson whistled and wondered whence had come the new strength which animated my pulse, my eyes, my whole being.

"And that makes two of you," said he, "because Wilson's sitting up shaving himself and says he'll take the yacht out to sea tomorrow."

XXXIX

AND so came the last day in Kalmut Fiord; and I greeted its dawning from the *Wanderer's* decks, where I had paced at intervals during the night, and I was not tired. In amazement I watched the sun roll back the fog-banks from the hills, for I was seeing with new eyes, and the sense of a new beginning, of a freshening of life, was upon me.

That same incomprehensible force which was clearing the valley of its nightly cloak of gray was stirring me, troubling me, lifting me. Vaguely—for my thoughts were elsewhere—I sensed the quickening of my being and knew that never had I been so thoroughly alive.

That night had been a period of alternate joy and torture to me. I flung myself on my bed, but the stateroom seemed insufferably small and confining.

I sprang up and went out, pacing the decks. I passed Betty's state-room and the thrill that leapt within me sent me staggering on, drunken with new feelings. I passed Chanler's room, and the thrill died and I was bitter. I sought the fore-deck and in my mind reenacted the meeting with Brack. There he had stood, there Betty, here myself. There her shoulder had touched mine and here I had met Brack as he hurled himself upon her. There Brack had kissed her, while I lay on the deck; there near the rail he had held her, and there I had taken her from him and for a brief moment had held her in my arms.

I pictured the night when she had called to him, and the memory of her tone was like a storm, shaking me to my knees. I looked in on Chanler and found him awake and reading. There was in his eyes the strength of a man who has won through a crisis and found peace. And well there might be! I told him that I wished to get back to Seattle, so I might quit him, as soon as possible, and went out before he could reply.

Old Slade, standing the dog-watch, approached me wonderingly and asked if I couldn't sleep.

"Sleep!" I sneered. "Why should a man want to do anything so simple as sleep when he can walk out here beneath the stars and torture himself with thoughts."

He stroked his long beard. "Pain cometh to all men——"

"So I've heard," I replied curtly, and walked away.

And so I greeted the dawning of our last day in the Hidden Country unslept; and yet I was as fresh as Wilson when he came hobbling up to judge the weather.

"A beautiful day, Mr. Pitt," said he, after studying the sky. "The good weather will hold, and short-handed as we are that's what we must be praying for."

"We sail today, then?"

"This afternoon, sir."

"Good!" I said. "It will be a relief to get out of here."

I breakfasted alone. From the cabin-door I saw Betty Baldwin come from her stateroom, stand blinking in the morning sun and filling her lungs with the tingling air. And she was beautiful to my eyes as she had never been before, and I entered my stateroom and locked the door.

Hours afterward I heard Black Sam dropping the paddles into a canoe alongside; heard him telling Betty that the craft was ready. Presently Chanler knocked on my door.

"Oh, Gardy! Come out here."

I flung open the door.

"Betty wants to have one last paddle down the bay," he said casually.

"Well," I replied, "why doesn't she go?"

"Can't go alone comfortably in that long canoe, you know. It won't handle except with some one in the bow."

"Are you busy?" I tried to be sarcastic and failed.

"It's your turn to go," he said. "She—she said so, old man. Go along, now. Good luck."

I TOOK my place in the bow without a word, without our eyes meeting. I was in no shape to paddle and sat with the paddle across my knees.

Betty began to paddle. Presently she stopped. We sat silent while the canoe drifted.

"I'd like to see our—to see that cave again, if you don't mind," she said timidly. "Do you?"

"Why should I?" I said.

Not a word more did we speak as we went through the gap into the bay proper nor while she paddled down to our landing-place. She steered the canoe past the rock where we had gone ashore to avoid leaving tracks behind us, and landed on the sandy beach. I got out stiffly and sat down upon a boulder.

"We're not going to play Injun this morning, then?" she said with a wan attempt at gaiety.

"No," said I. "Why should we? There's no necessity now."

"Don't—don't you ever play Injun except when it's necessary?" she said reproachfully.

I did not reply.

"Didn't you like to play Injun that time?"

"It served its purpose," I said.

She cast at me a swift and troubled glance, bowed her head, and stepped out. Without looking back she started up the hill, and presently I rose, without any conscious effort on my part, and began to follow.

Once she stopped and looked behind her; I only felt it; I dared not look to see. For the tumult which woke within me at the sight of her as she moved through that primitive scene frightened me. It seemed to lift me above, or cast me below, considerations of right or wrong. My conventional self whispered that I was treading on dangerous ground; that I must not go up the hill. But I went, even as Brack had gone, in answer to Betty's call, but with my eyes held fearfully on the ground.

"Look!" she cried at the cave's mouth. "The foliage has grown so in a few days that you scarcely could tell we'd ever had an entrance there."

I tore the brush aside to make a way for her and stood aside with eyes averted.

"Aren't you going in—Mr. Pitt?" she asked softly.

"No," I said. "Why should I?"

She sighed and crumpled up a little and entered the cave alone. For awhile there came no sound from within, but I dared not look to see what she was doing. Then she began to move around.

"Oh, the poor little branches!" She was half-whispering to herself. "All withered up and dead, all gone from their pretty little trees. Poor, poor little leaves. And they looked so bright and hopeful once, and now they're gray and dead. And the moss is drying. The soft, pretty moss! All turned hard and dry. What a pity! What a little, little pity!"

She was silent for awhile. I peered in and saw her on her knees, her hands tenderly stroking the withered moss with which we had carpeted the cave.

"Good-by, little cave," she whispered. "By-by."

She did not come out at once. There was a moment during which I turned my back on the cave, not daring to look in, and the only motion and sound in the world was that of the young Summer breeze stirring through the age-old scene.

"Mr. Pitt—Gardy." She was only

whispering, yet her voice was strong enough to reach forth and sway me where I stood. I did not reply. The fight was going against me. Flight would have saved me, yet I would not fly. But if I trusted myself to speak, I would be lost.

"Aren't you going to bid our cave goodby?"

I took a step away. I should have taken many; for I felt then that right and safety prescribed that I step out of the lives of Betty and George, promptly and forever.

And seconds passed, seconds that seemed minutes, and I hoped that she would not speak again.

Presently she was standing behind me. I knew it, though I had not heard or seen her come. Straight ahead I looked, out over the bay, denying the force that urged me to do otherwise.

"Gardy!"

"Don't!" I moaned. "Go back—get in the canoe; go back to George—alone—quick!"

"Gardy!"

She placed her fingers on my arm. And I turned around and faced her, because I could not do otherwise. Then suddenly all the winds in the world seemed to be pressing upon me, drawing, coaxing, forcing me toward her. One agonized cry my conscience sent up in protest at the wrong I did. Then I swept her to me; I held her against my breast; I kissed her; then tore myself away.

Slowly, painfully I lifted my gaze from the ground to take my punishment from her eyes. And then my heart leaped and stopped within me. For Betty, with her hands clasped rapturously before her, was looking up at me with the soft flame of grateful happiness in her expression.

"Oh, Gardy, Gardy!" She swayed her shoulders a little. "Then you do care for me; you do—you do—don't you?"

"Betty!"

"Oh, oh!" She teetered up and down on her toes, unable to contain herself. "He cares for her; he isn't going to leave little Betty all lonesome and unhappy!"

I saw her and heard her in a half-daze.

"Betty!" I cried. "What does this mean?"

"It means that I'm happy—happy! I'm the happiest girl in the world!"

"Happy? Now? Because I kissed you, when you're engaged to George?"

It was her turn to stare blankly.

"Engaged to George?" she said.

I stammered brokenly a flood of words.

"He said you'd come to an understanding—that everything was all right—and as it should be."

"That's true. Oh, that's very true!"

"That you'd opened your heart to him."

"I did—I did!"

"And—and I knew by the look in his eyes as well as his saying so that you had come to an understanding."

"And you knew right, Gardy; perfectly right."

"Then, what——"

"I did open my heart to him, and I told him everything. And we both knew it was all right—everything all right—and as it should be."

My voice grew small and faint and all but failed me.

"Then—then what was it you told him, Betty?"

She wrung her hands, and her eyes were filled with tears, but neither the gesture nor the tears were those of distress.

"Oh, Gardy, my boy!" she cried holding out her arms. "Are you going to make me propose to you?"

XL

WE STAYED there at the cave much longer than we had planned. At times, during the forenoon, conscience smote us.

"Really, they'll be worrying about us on the yacht," said I.

"They certainly will," agreed Betty.

"They're probably getting ready to sail now."

"Undoubtedly."

"We're short-handed; I ought to be there to help," I suggested.

"You certainly had."

"We'd better go."

"Oh, positively!"

And then we would forget the yacht, the imminence of sailing, everything but ourselves, for a considerable space of time. It was all a little too wonderful for me to grasp intelligently, but Betty accepted it with the woman's genius for such events.

"I don't understand?" I repeated over and over. "You had an understanding with George while I was knocked out, and George seemed satisfied?"

"Yes; he was satisfied, dear. He was fine enough and strong enough to be that."

"And you told him?"

"Gardy, dearest! Are you going to make me say it after all?"

"Positively. You know I'm harsh and stern. You told George——"

She clasped her arms about me, pressing against my breast, surrender and victory in her upturned face.

"I told him that I loved you. I told him that if you didn't get well—oh, my boy, my boy! I was so frightened over you!"

"And George was satisfied with that?"

"Yes. He had accepted it by that time. He said he knew it from the moment I came on board, and he knew now that it was all right."

After a long silence I persisted—

"When did you know it, Betty?"

She blushed.

"I don't want to tell you that."

I coaxed.

"Well, if you must know, I—I *hoped* from the first time I saw you."

"You hoped! Good heavens, dear! Why didn't you let me know. I—I didn't think I had a chance."

She snuggled more closely against me.

"A girl can't let a man know she loves him until she knows that he loves her, dear. You seemed so far away, and so—so disinterested. I was afraid you would never let me know that—that you loved me."

"But I thought it was George, Betty. How could I let you know? You see, it's the first time I've done this sort of thing."

"You dear, blind darling!"

"I know it now. I see. But even now I can't see why—I can hardly believe——"

"Tut, tut!" She pinched my arm. "Can he believe now? Isn't it real, to him?"

"I've acted like a brute since the night we left the cave, Betty."

"So you have. Deep, 'bysmal brute."

"I was angry because you said you wouldn't have George risking his life for you. I was jealous."

"Oh, darling! Were you really? I gloat!" She rocked in my arms, then grew suddenly serious. "How could I have him risking his life for me, Gardy, dear? I had nothing to give him. I knew then it was you, you; only you. I had no right to let George make any sacrifice for me. You—you were my man. Do you understand?"

"Yes, dear."

"And when I called to poor Captain Brack that night, Gardy, I was calling to you with my heart. Oh! I was calling so to you. Do you understand that, too, dear?"

"Yes; yes!"

"And—and you heard, too, didn't you, Gardy? You heard me, because you wanted to hear it, didn't you? And when we came here this morning, and you were so far-awayish I was afraid you hadn't heard at all. Oh, Gardy!" She looked up with eyes wet from happiness too great to be suppressed. "Isn't life good to us? Isn't it glorious to be alive!"

"And think of it!" I whispered. "We're just beginning a new life—just beginning to live."

"Yes," she whispered, stroking my hand. "We've explored the hidden country." Then she quoted Brack: " 'There is hidden country in all of us; and until we've explored it we don't know what it is to live.' "

A silence fell upon us as deep, as primitive as the aged rocks about us, and ere we spoke again the *Wanderer's* siren had sent its strident notes down the fiord warning us that it was time for luncheon.

"I suppose we must really go now," sighed Betty as we rose. "Ah, little cave, little cave!" she murmured, holding her arms out to it. "You are a good little cave and you helped make one little girl very, very happy."

"And one man, too," said I. "We'll never forget this cave, dear, even though the time we spent in it was trying enough."

"No, we'll never forget it." Her grave, gray eyes were looking far out over the fiord. "It has become a part of our lives. It has all become a part of our lives—our new lives, Gardy, dear. We'll not forget any of it. Oh, dearest! Maybe sometime we can come back here, and camp here, and remember all these wonderful days. You'll never forget them, and what they've meant to us, will you, dear?"

"We will neither of us forget as long as we live!"

"Yes. I feel that, too. We'll look back, and we'll never forget any of it, not even Captain Brack."

"Poor Brack!"

She leaned against me, as if seeking shelter from the sad thoughts of the moment.

"Yes, we'll even remember him with gladness, Gardy. Won't we?"

"Yes. Of course. For it was Brack who led us into the hidden country."

"Yes; yes." She lifted her eyes slowly to mine. "He led us into the hidden country; but, oh, Gardy, my heart! What was it that led us out!"

And I answered with my lips, but not with words.

IF I HAD AN INCOME

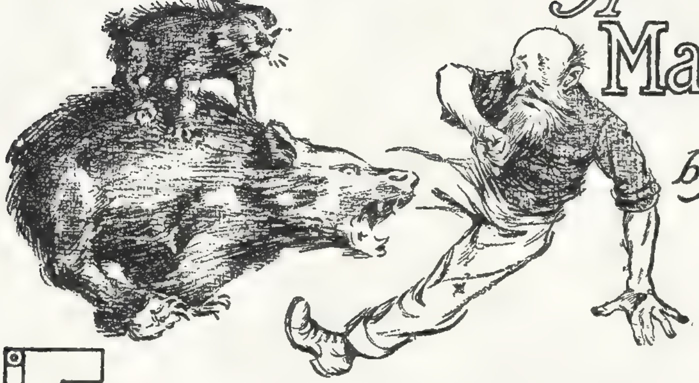
by GORDON SEAGRAVE

IF I had an income—a dollar a day—
I'd drift with the coming of Spring
To lands that have called me from far, far away,
Where wild rivers bubble and sing;
My tent as my mansion, my blanket my cot,
My province the hillsides in May,
My breakfast the prey of the long rifle's shot,
If I had an income—a dollar a day.

If I had an income—a dollar a day—
I'd sail to the south sapphire seas
In a stanch little ship, with a smart little way
And canvas that hungered for breeze
As she sped through the surge for a palm-studded isle,
And laughed as she buckled her way.
And there I would anchor to rest me a while,
If I had an income—a dollar a day.

If I had an income—a dollar a day—
I'd seek out the land of the sun,
To doze and to dream, and idle or play,
From dawn till the night had begun;
Forgetting the cities, the murk and the grime,
The fight, and the faces of gray;
Forgetting the hunger, the want and the crime;
If I had an income—a dollar a day.

If I had an income—a dollar a day—
Fulfilment would come to my dream,
The things I would do would enlighten my way
Through the world and its workaday scheme.
But dreams are the children of elders who shirk,
And so, in these doldrums of gray,
I shall bend both my shoulders to mountains of work
To get me an income—a dollar a day.



A Man Sized Pet

by W·C·Tuttle

Author of "Magpie's Nightbear," "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," etc.

IT WAS an incongruous group that sat around the rough pine table in Magpie Simpkins's cabin, and played pitch by the light of an old smoky kerosene lamp.

Magpie Simpkins, six feet two, slender to the point of emaciation, with the face of a scholar above his walrus-like mustache, sat there peering at his cards through the only pair of glasses on Sleeping Creek.

Magpie had been to Missoula a short time before and at the earnest solicitation of an optician had purchased a pair of glasses, *sans* bows, which he fastened to his person through the medium of a wide silk ribbon. At the present time he wore the ribbon around his neck for safety.

Tellurium Woods, the second of the trio, was as fat as any outdoor man could ever expect to be, and his bald head and luxuriant brown beard gave one the impression of looking at a billiard ball on a rug. Tellurium affected buckskin shirts of his own manufacture and design, and it was impossible to tell, at the neck, just where the shirt left off and the skin began.

Bantie Weyman was the exact opposite of the others. He was about five feet two inches in height and would weigh about a hundred. He had a soprano voice, a gold tooth, and took baths. In the latter he differed from any one else on the range.

Bantie wasn't exactly a man's man but he did a man's work on his claim in Bear Gulch and claimed to be the champion sourdough bread-maker of the world. Bantie was timid—so timid that he wouldn't pack a gun, and the only armament of his cabin consisted of a .22 rifle with a section of cleaning-rod broken off inside the barrel.

These three represented the social column of Sleeping Creek. Their cabins were situated within a radius of two miles, and in order to keep up the social life of the district they had instituted a private pitch club—two bits a corner and ten cents set back. The three were to alternate as hosts.

At this, their first session, there was a fourth party present. It seemed very much interested in the hands held by Bantie, much to Bantie's embarrassment and to the huge delight of the others. Bantie played the jack of diamonds and snorted loudly as Magpie took it with the queen and a chuckle.

"Magpie, yuh got to put that bear outside!" he shrilled. "He gits his danged nose in m' ear and I don't know whether I'm playin' th' jack or th' ace! I got th' ace—see? By golly! That sets me back three and costs me ten cents! I ain't goin' to riffle another card until yuh puts that emblem uh California out in th' shed, *sabe?*"

"Haw! Haw!" roared Tellurium. "Be uh man, Bantie. That pore li'l grizzly won't hurt yuh. Look at him! He's plumb heartbroke over them words, Bantie. While yore uh fair—jist fair—pitch player, Bantie, yuh lacks something. If yuh was simply sloppy with th' milk uh human kindness like me and Magpie you'd git uh pet."

"That ultimatum," replied Bantie, "covers that wolf uh yours under th' bunk, Tellurium. Every time I turns to spit I got to look into his shinin' eyes. Don't th' loafer never sleep?"

"Well," grinned Tellurium, "he ain't no regular Rip Van Winkle, but he's tame—tame enough fer uh man. I believes in uh man-sized pet and fer that reason I cottons to th' wolf. Uh course he's only good fer uh grown man."

Bantie grunted and put on his coat.

"My re-marks goes as she lays," he stated. "I don't play with no danged menagerie. It's bad enough to be whipsawed by uh pair uh snake-hunters like you and Magpie but I draws th' line at havin' uh wolf under m' feet and uh grizzly workin' down wind behind m' ear. Why I——"

"Say, Tellurium, did yuh ever see my bear dance?" interrupted Magpie.

"He's there four ways from th' jack. Watch him now."

Magpie slid the table over against the wall and took a rusty gold-pan from behind the stove. Using it as a tamborine, he began a shuffle on the rough floor.

The bear watched him for a minute and then with a squeal of delight got up on its hind legs and began to prance around the cabin. Bantie forgot his fear and began to shuffle too, while Tellurium sat with his feet over the end of the bunk and sang "Annie Laurie" in a husky voice to the tune of "A Hot Time."

Whether through accident or design the bear danced straight for the shuffling Bantie, who was intent on watching his own toes. Bantie looked up as the bear was almost against him and he stepped back hurriedly out of harm's way. At least he was out of the bear's way but unfortunately one of his boot heels landed squarely on the front foot of the wolf under the bunk.

A description of the rest of the action would be pure fiction as no one in the cabin ever knew just what did happen. Suffice to say that when the explosion was over Magpie was under the table, Tellurium was under the bunk, the bear was whining up on the rafters, Bantie and the wolf were gone and so was the one window to the cabin.

It was probably ten minutes later that Bantie stuck his head into the open window and panted:

"My remarks still goes as she lays! I'll play solitaire until m' mind goes abroad before I'll play in uh zoo like this again! Any time you jaspers want to play with me jist leave th' specimens tied up, *sabe?*"

"Did yuh git cut up any, Bantie?" grinned Magpie.

"Lost m' pants," stated Bantie in a soprano voice.

Tellurium grinned and took a fresh chew.

"Better git uh pet to keep yuh company. Fine thing fer uh man."

His accent on the last word irritated Bantie so much that he shrugged his thin shoulders and started off in the dark toward his cabin without replying.

"Hey!" yelled Tellurium. "What did yuh do with my wolf?"

"He'll git back some time tomorrow!" shrilled Bantie. "That is, if he don't lose m' return trail."

THE next night Magpie and Tellurium ambled down to Bantie's cabin, ostensibly to square things with Bantie but it is worthy of notice that they took their pets along. Bantie wasn't home and the cabin was locked, so they went back to Tellurium's cabin and played single-handed poker.

It was four days later that Bantie sat in front of his cabin, and the stoop was gone from his shoulders. He was having the time of his life watching a little gray kitten pull off stunts with an old newspaper.

"Ain't he th' little rascal?" he chuckled. "Gosh, he shore is some pet and that's whatever. I'm shore pleased with his color—yes sir. Almost uh dead ringer fer—huh! That's goin' to be uh good joke if it works. It's goin' to re-quire some thinkin'. Twenty dollars rent! That's uh heap uh—gosh! Here comes Magpie down th' trail! Kitty, kitty, kitty—well, git in th' house then. Doggone, I got to cache that cat before he gits here."

Bantie was busy with his broom when Magpie leaned against the doorway with a broad grin.

"Hello, Bantie. When did yuh git back?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Come inside while I sweeps this dirt out."

Magpie came in and sat down on the bunk.

"To see yuh handle that broom, Bantie, reminds me uh heap of uh fee-male person. You shore are finicky about yor floor."

Bantie blushed through his tan and swept vigorously.

Magpie saw that he had riled Bantie so he continued:

"You shore ought to have uh pet around yore cabin. Uh feller gits uh heap uh comfort out of uh pet. Now, old man Sims down at th' forks, has got uh litter uh gray kittens and I know he'd shore admire to give yuh one. Uh course yuh don't want nothin' bigger nor more fee-rocious than house cats. Wild animal pets are only fit fer——"

He had started to make a depreciatory gesture with his right hand, which had suddenly come into contact with fur. Also the fur moved. Magpie took one look and then swallowed his tobacco. A wildcat was sitting on the bunk beside him and two big, yellow eyes stared into his. Magpie knew wildcats—knew that no living animal could move more quickly. But if any wildcat had caught Magpie in the next ten seconds it would have set a new record for the species.

Bantie dropped his broom as Magpie went past and then leaned against the doorway and watched him slow down a hundred yards away and pull his gun as he whirled. The little gray kitten rubbed against Bantie's leg and he picked it up and cuddled it to his face as he watched Magpie scratch his neck and then amble off up the trail.

To say that Magpie was astonished as he plodded off up that trail would be putting it mildly.

"I wonder if that was uh bob-cat?" he queried aloud. "Dang it all, my eyes ain't what they used to be. Leavin' my specs to home that away puts me plumb dim in th' vision, but—huh, that shore looked like uh bob-cat—yes sir! But shucks, it ain't possible! Bantie with uh bob-cat! No siree, it ain't reasonable I tell yuh! Must 'a' been my eyes I reckon."

He went rumbling along the trail with his head down and nearly ran headlong into Tellurium.

"Whoa, yuh old goat!" yelled Tellurium. "What yuh tryin' to do—butt yore way home?"

"Howdy, Tellurium. Where yuh goin'?"

"Reckoned I'd pilgrim down and see if Bantie's got home yet. Did yuh see him?"

"Uh-ha. I stopped by his cabin fer uh spell."

"Did he have anything to say about me and you and th' pets?" asked Tellurium, with a grin.

"Not uh word. I reckon he's done forgot it. Nice li'l feller that Bantie."

"Nice enough fer uh runt, but I don't admire th' breed none. He's too doggone scary, Magpie."

"Un-ha," agreed Magpie. "He shore ain't got no corner on nerve. Well, I got to be goin'. Come over tonight and play uh little poker. I don't suppose Bantie wants to play but yuh might ask him."

Tellurium rambled off down the trail and Magpie stood there and watched him for a while. Finally he scratched his neck and murmured:

"Mebby I'd ought to have told him but —shucks, it wasn't nothin'—not uh danged thing! But jist th' same I—huh!"

Bantie was washing a pair of overalls in a battered dishpan when Tellurium hove in sight, and he threw them over a stump to dry.

"Howdy, Bantie," greeted Tellurium, with a wide-mouthed grin. "As uh particular feller you shore got 'em all skinned. Washin' overalls! What's th' use uh that? Say, I'll bet you takes uh bath too when nobody ain't lookin'. Haw! Haw! I knowed uh feller oncet who used to take uh bath twice uh month regular. Dang near rubbed all th' skin off hisself. You ought to git uh buckskin shirt like mine, Bantie. Them skin shirts keep yuh from gittin' dirty—sort a fit so tight th' dirt can't git in, *sabe?*"

Bantie grinned and dried his hands.

"Go inside, Tellurium, and sit down while I gits some fresh water. I drinks uh lot uh water this hot weather."

"Un-ha, I reckon yuh would," replied Tellurium, as Bantie took the pail and started for the creek. "Yes sir, I wouldn't put it uh bit past yuh—drinkin' lots uh water."

It was probably two minutes later when Bantie came back whistling with his pail of water and entered the cabin.

"This old Sleepin' Creek shore produces th' fine water," he remarked but there was no response—the cabin was empty.

He walked to the door and looked around but there was no sign of Tellurium.

"That's danged funny!" he exclaimed aloud. "Where in thunder is Tellurium?"

He went outside and walked around the cabin and then came in and looked under the bunk.

"Well, I'll be uh——"

He gasped as he pulled an object from under the bunk and held it up to the light. It was a battered old sombrero and in the crown was punched the initials, T. W.

"Mama mine!" chuckled Bantie. "And Tellurium shore wasn't built fer such speed neither!"

The little gray kitten on the bunk voiced its hunger and got a whole can of precious condensed milk for supper that night.

TELLURIUM went over to play poker with Magpie that night but neither of them mentioned Bantie until the evening was nearly over. Magpie shoved back from the table and began to polish his glasses on a piece of buckskin.

"My eyes are gittin' plumb bad," he complained. "Sometimes I think I see things and I know doggone well I don't. I reckon I'd better wear my specs all th' time."

"Reckon I'll have to git some too," agreed Tellurium.

"Yore vision botherin' yuh too?"

"Same as yours."

"When did yuh notice it first?"

"This afternoon. I—huh—say, Magpie, did yuh notice anything—well, sort a unusual down to Bantie's?"

"Say!" exploded Magpie, leaning across the table. "Did you see it too?"

"*Felt* it is nearer th' word. Th' danged thing kept my Sunday hat!"

Magpie continued to polish his glasses and seemed lost in reflection.

"Jist about what do yuh reckon it is?" questioned Tellurium. "I didn't stay long enough to make uh good estimate."

"You and me both," agreed Magpie. "What little I saw of it shore re-sembled uh bob-cat, but bein' hasty thataway uh feller can't depend on snap judgement. Knowin' Bantie like we do I'm inclined to argue that we both was seein' things which ain't."

"Well, mebby," half agreed Tellurium. "But if it was it's th' first time that bad eyesight ever caused uh streak uh gray dynamite to crawl my frame and spit brimstone over my carcass and forcibly take my hat away. Mebby I'm seein' things, Magpie, but if I am I shore didn't start in th' lower grades. No sir, I reckon I got into fast company immediately."

"I'll tell yuh what we'll do," continued Tellurium, getting up and putting on his coat, "we'll go down there tomorrow and take our pets along. If that is uh bob-cat I'd shore admire to have it hop my wolf."

"And git yore wolf all scratched to shoestrings," grinned Magpie. "My grizzly is more like it. Bob-cats as uh rule don't hanker none to climb th' frame of grizzlies."

"We'll take 'em both," replied Tellurium, settling the argument. "I don't care a dang what happens jist so I gits my hat back. That lid cost me twelve dollars five years ago and I longs fer it something scandalous, Magpie."

THE next morning Magpie and Tellurium arrived at Bantie's cabin with their pets. The grizzly was a poor leader and Magpie was worn out trying to drag several hundred pounds of protesting bear for two miles over a trail. Tellurium was equally tired from having to dig his heels into the ground all the way trying to hold his wolf to a sedate pace.

Bantie was sitting in the shady side of his cabin reading, and on his lap lay a little gray kitten. Tellurium saw the kitten first and stopped in his tracks, but the wolf kept right on going and nearly upset Bantie's chair. The kitten arched its back, clawed its way up the side of the cabin and spat at the wolf from the eaves.

"What yuh tryin' to do?" yelled Bantie, trying to escape from the attentions of the pets. "Gol dang it! When yuh comes visitin' why don't yuh come a-lone!"

"Givin' th' pets uh little airin'," mumbled Magpie, still eying the kitten on the roof. "Where did yuh git th' kitten, Bantie?"

"Got him from old man Sims uh few days ago. I needed company so I gits th' kitten. Didn't yuh see him when yuh was here before?"

"Say," continued Bantie, before Magpie had a chance to answer, "where did yuh go th' other day, Tellurium? When I gits back with that pail uh water yuh was gone. I finds the kitten maulin' yore hat around th' floor and you ain't no place in sight."

"I—I—huh! You say yuh finds that kitten playin' with my hat?"

Bantie picked the hat off the bed and handed it to Tellurium.

"Ain't that yore hat?"

"By golly, she shore is!" exclaimed Tellurium. "How do yuh reckon that hat got down here? I must be gittin' absent minded, Magpie."

"I reckon yore both that way," grinned Bantie. "Th' other day Magpie is here sittin' comfortably on m' bunk, and all to oncet he shoots out of th' door and gallops off up th' trail. I stands here plumb surprised. I'm plumb scared that he's loco."

Magpie looked at Tellurium in an inquiring way, but Tellurium's face was hopelessly blank.

The bear and wolf, unleashed, wandered into the cabin just as Bantie stood up and remarked:

"You fellers might as well come in out of th' sun. Mebby it was th' heat that affected yuh. I've got uh li'l bottle of hooch from old man Sims' keg, and he told me that it was th'——"

"Say no more, Bantie," beamed Tellurium, starting for the cabin door closely followed by the willing Magpie. "Old man Sims gives me uh shot uh that stuff oncet and ever since that time I've wished——"

Came a roar of pain and a yelp of surprise and the upheaval started. A streak of roan-colored bear, with a gray hump on its back, hit Magpie dead center, knocking him back into Tellurium, and as they fell the bear raked them fore and aft and the wolf, yipping like the fiends of the bad place were tied to its tail, raced across their prostrate bodies and disappeared in a cloud of dust up the trail.

The wolf, running at its best speed, was a poor second to the bear. The bear was carrying weight but handled it nicely.

Bantie leaned against the door frame and shrilled his mirth in a high key while the little gray kitten stood in the door and looked inquiringly at the two in the dust.

"What in —— happened?" wailed Magpie, feeling tenderly of a spot on his chest where the bear had grasped a foothold.

"Avalanche!" gasped Tellurium. "Top of th' mountain busted right off and half of it hit me in th' belt-buckle. I reckon I'd better light uh match to see if I'm conscious."

Magpie gazed ruefully up the trail as he brushed off his clothes.

"I wonder what got into them pets? Gosh, uh grizzly shore has uh lot uh motive power when he gits a-goin'! Where yuh goin' Tellurium?"

"I'm goin' to find them animiles and see what's th' matter. Gol darn! I wouldn't take uh fortune fer that wolf. He's uh——"

"Man-sized pet," finished Bantie with a grin, as he picked up the little gray kitten and snuggled it to his face. "Pore li'l kitty, did they scare yuh?"

"Scare——!" exploded Magpie. "I'll bet—huh!"

He turned and followed Tellurium up the trail, and Bantie watched them with an expectant grin on his face. The trail led over a point of rocks above the creek and at that point there was a sheer drop of about fifteen feet to the water, which was about five feet in depth.

Magpie caught up with Tellurium at this place and they stopped to argue the question. Beyond them the trail curved sharply around another cliff of rocks.

Tellurium shoved his hands into his pockets and faced Magpie belligerently.

"It don't stand to reason, Magpie, that uh house cat——"

His argument was cut off. The avalanche had returned.

Being as the two were occupying most of the trail there was no chance to avoid the shock. Tellurium had hold of Magpie's arm and the two of them performed their aerial spin and dip of death as one person.

The chase had evidently turned as the wolf was in the lead and using all the power of its legs and voice to hold that lead. The bear was due to slow up or run over the wolf if the race continued for a hundred yards further.

"Leggo my face!" spluttered Magpie, trying to shake Tellurium's grip loose and grab a trailing willow shoot at the same time. "What yuh tryin' to do, drown me?"

"Don't claw me—gimme room!" gasped Tellurium. He lunged toward the bank and shook Magpie's hold from the willow.

"Danged hippopotamus, tread water!" choked Magpie. "Leggo my arm! If I ever gits you—gurgle—gurgle—on dry land—leggo!"

"What did yuh push me in fer?" wailed Tellurium.

He tried to stand up but the current was too strong and he went pin-wheeling his way down the creek to a sand-bar. Magpie, relieved of Tellurium's clutches, managed to grab the bank and pull himself out. He wandered down to where Tellurium was pouring the water out of his boots and sat down disconsolately on a log.

"I'd shore admire to know what happened?" he remarked. "Something shore has happened that I ain't got no light on. Now, that danged little kitten ain't—huh, I dunno, I dunno."

"No, it shore ain't," agreed Tellurium foolishly. "But if it ain't, what is? I asks yuh, Magpie, what is?"

"Why ask me?" demanded Magpie.

"Do yuh reckon I'm uh palmist? I know one thing, I'm goin' over and git my bear. Whatever it is it ain't no place fer bears. I reckon I'll have to tame that pet all over again. Let's go over and interview Bantie."

Bantie was still standing in the door with his kitten on his arm and he grinned widely at their dilapidated appearance.

Magpie wiped his mustache and glared at Bantie.

"Where's my bear?"

"And also that wolf uh mine!" snapped Tellurium.

"Do yuh want 'em sudden like or jist natural?" inquired Bantie.

"Sudden like suits me!" stated Magpie. "If I could git away from this place goin' uh thousand feet uh second I'd feel that I was sort a loiterin'."

"Watch m' root-house door," said Bantie, as he shoved the kitten back into the cabin and shut the door.

The root-house was simply a dug-out under the cabin, with a rough hinged door opening on a slant from the ground. The door was closed but not fastened. Magpie started to walk over and open it but he moved too late.

Came a yelp and a grunt of fear and the door heaved up, nearly tearing the hinges off, and the bear sailed out of the cellar and streaked for the nearest tree.

The wolf hit only the highest points of the scenery until it came to a high point across the creek, where it stopped long enough to elevate its nose and voice its displeasure to the world.

Inside the cabin Bantie was down on his hands and knees, peering down into the cellar through a hole made by removing some of the rough flooring. He pulled on a short rope and called softly and a full-grown wildcat climbed out of the hole and rubbed affectionately against his leg. Bantie tied the leash to the bunk leg and the cat crawled under the bunk.

"By th' great horn spoon!" exclaimed Bantie. "You shore are some pet! Frenchy Burgoyne said uh mouthful when he said that yuh didn't allow strangers to trespass. Li'l cat, yuh cost me jist twenty dollars rent but yore shore worth it—every cent. I plumb hates to take yuh back but uh bargain's uh bargain. As uh bare-back rider of grizzlies I takes m' hat off to you, li'l bob-cat."

Outside, Magpie and Tellurium leaned against each other and watched the wolf bid farewell to humanity.

Finally, evidently with misgivings, the bear slid down out of the tree. It gazed at the two with melancholy in its little eyes and then waddled off into the willows down Sleeping Creek.

Tellurium sat down heavily on a log and wiped his bald head with a wet handkerchief.

"This is gittin' to be th' dangdest——"

"Look!" exclaimed Magpie, pointing to the open root-house door. The little gray kitten was perched on the top step and its little ears twitched as it looked cautiously about before coming out.

"What General Sherman said about war, goes double fer cats!" remarked Tellurium.

Magpie scratched his neck thoughtfully for a moment and then started off down the Sleeping Creek trail on a half run.

"Where in —— yuh goin'?" yelled Tellurium.

Magpie stopped for a moment and considered the little kitten on the root-house door, before he yelled back:

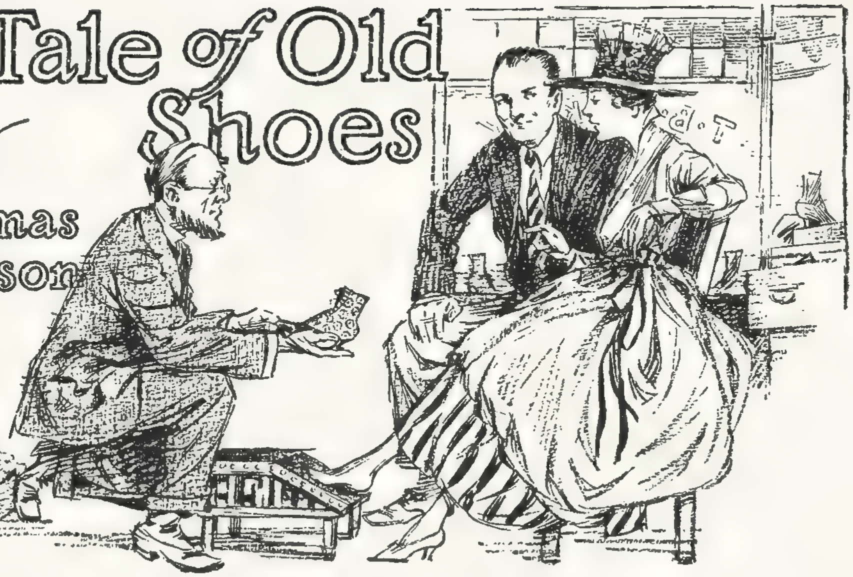
"I'm goin' down to dicker with old man Sims before he gits rid of all that litter uh cats. I needs uh pet and I shore admires th' best there is."

"You and me both," agreed Tellurium fervently, and they went down the trail together.

A Tale of Old Shoes

by

Thomas Addison



Author of "Come-On Charley," "The Boss of Powderville," etc.

I USED to believe, when I knew more than I do now—say when I as twenty-five or six—that selling goods was a matter of argumentative demonstration: you showed your line and talked it up. I've learned better since. Luck has a lot to do with it, and to prove it I will tell you about a sale Bert Vinton made.

Herbert Halloway Vinton is the way he's registered in the Family Bible; but with his trade he's just plain "Bert." It's a bet half of them wouldn't know his last name if it was printed on a banner and strung across the street.

Bert turned the trick I have in mind down in a tight little Southern city not much bigger than a pancake—sold fifty-nine dozen pairs of ladies' shoes that were dead as Hector's mother-in-law, so far as current styles went. I got the story from Bert himself. I've told it a few times and fixed it up some maybe, but the facts are right.

Bert traveled out of Baltimore for Binn & Co., dry goods and notions, until they went under all of a sudden last Fall. You remember that failure; it was talked about for a whole day. Old Pussyfoot Robinson, the cashier, had been milking the concern for years and blew his roof off when finally they caught him with his fingers in the cream. And it happened only the week after Bert started on his Southern trip.

Bert had got married the day before he left. He had a couple of thousand salted away, but being, as you can tell by that, a wise young bird, he didn't see any reason why he shouldn't mix his matrimony with his merchandising and cut his honeymoon expenses down by half; so he took his wife along. The boys do this once in a while, though it's not exactly regular.

I knew Minnie Abbott before she was married, and I forgot to mention she was with Bert when he told his story. What he left out she put in, and I guessed the rest.

Minnie worked for Amos Lowe before Bert stole her; had charge of his coat and suit department—a cool, slim, competent young person, stylish as a Doucet model, and with a pair of gray eyes in her head that have a way of turning blue when she laughs. Makes you think of larkspur, and soft Summer skies, and that sort of thing.

WELL, Oakville is the name of this little Dixie city where Bert got the bad news from Baltimore poked at him. I've made it many a time. It's on the N. & E.—twenty-eight hundred inhabitants, not counting in the dogs and the State Normal School for Women, which brings it up to thirty-six hundred when the open season for girls is on. That's when Bert had the good luck to hit the burg. It was along about the middle of September, just when the Lucy Janes and Ruby Anns and Lottie Mays were flitting in from the woods for forty miles around to dip into the founts of learning.

Bert and Minnie breeze in on a Monday night. They put up at the Oakville House where the nigger cook knows to a half a dollar how brown Bert likes his waffles, and which side to fry his eggs on. The first thing Bert has passed to him, after they've registered, is a charge telegram from Mike McDougal, head shipping-clerk back home. It tells him Binn & Co., have blown up and the pieces haven't come down yet.

Bert goes in to supper with this piece of gossip for an appetizer. He's planning to keep it to himself till Minnie has tucked away the feed; but she sees right off there's something on his mind, and being as matter-of-fact as a last year's coat-suit when it comes to business she sets to work to pry him loose from his worry.

"Lean on me, Bertie, dear," she says to him quietly. "We are partners now—fifty-fifty, make or lose. Hand me out my share of what's ailing you."

"Oh, well," Bert says, giving in before those steady gray eyes of hers, "it isn't much, Min. I've lost my job, that's all."

He flips Mike's wire across to her with a rush order grin to show he doesn't give a darn. Minnie reads it without any special excitement.

"Too bad for Binn," she remarks; "but I'm not going to let this honey and waffles get away from me for anything short of a riot. I want you to dig up the receipt for them, Bert. When we settle down to housekeeping I'm going to cut out a line of these goods on this present pattern."

She goes on talking like this as if not a shadow had been cast on their fair young lives; and Bert sits there and worships her. When you come to pure grit in the pinch of pain, poverty or plain bad luck, a man's a puling babe alongside of a woman. Bert chirks up a whole lot as he looks at her.

"Say, Min," he observes, "I ought never to have brought you on this half-price wedding jaunt anyway. I'll ship my samples in and we'll light out for Virginia Beach in the morning and make the finish right. Afterward I'll hook on to a job that won't blow up when my back is turned."

Minnie gives a little pleased laugh, and they romp through the rest of that meal like a couple of kids at a picnic.

"Now come on," she says, when they've made a clean-up. "Show me around the town. Where's this big school you've been telling about? I want to study misses' styles."

Bert grins as he leads her to the air.

"Hold fast to me," he warns her. "You'll see plenty of them right here on Center Street. There's so many different models it'll make you dizzy watching them go by. Girls! Gee, I'd like to dress 'em all—I mean sell 'em suits," he adds in some haste.

"That's better," Minnie tells him, her eyes a dancing blue. And they go on up the street.

There's girls and girls—whole regiments of them—crowding the walks. It's the first day of school, and they've got "liberty" till nine o'clock. The two ice-cream parlors on Center Street are buzzing with them, and the shops are keeping open to catch the shoal of dimes they're letting loose. They range from sweet sixteen to terrible twenty, and they're all sizes, shapes and shades—tall, small, fat, flat, dark, fair, plain, pretty and between. And styles! Minnie leans hard on Bert and catches her breath.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" she gasps. "Where on earth do they get those clothes?"

Of course they are not all turned out so queer. Some of them are only a year behind the Philadelphia models, but most of them—Well, Bert swells up as he looks at Minnie lilting along beside him like a Paris importation. And the girls take notice. Something new has happened in Oakville, they begin to diffuse around.

"Never mind the school, Bert, darling," Minnie says to him. "These samples are good enough for me. Let's turn and go down the street. I don't want to miss any of this."

"All right," Bert agrees, "only I'll have to stop in at one or two places and tell them Binn has been torpedoed."

And here is where Bert runs head first into the luck I've been fixing to tell you about.

They go down the street, he and Minnie, till they come to T. B. Rickey's dry goods and general furnishing store. It's the biggest in the town.

Rickey is standing in the door, his back to a windowful of shoes. He's one of these middle-aged, sad-looking chaps with a too-much-soda-in-the-biscuits complexion; you know what I mean—a sort of dingy yellow. He's not what you'd call a popular man.

He's stubborn as a mule, and a dollar isn't any more to him than his ten toes. His competitors love him like a bad account, but Bert hails him like an old college chum and introduces Minnie.

"I ain't needing anything I know of, Bert, this time," begins Rickey in the usual way, after he has said what is right to Minnie. "Business is something terrible, and collections——"

Bert cuts in on him with a laugh—he's one of the few boys I know who can kid a man like Rickey and get by with it—and he says:

"Save that for Jakey Bloom, T. B. He'll be along next week with a line of stickers you'll tumble for. This is only a society call I'm paying you. I'm taking a sudden rest from booking orders."

Then he gives out the bulletin from Mike. It doesn't seem to shock Rickey much. In fact, it brightens him up considerably, now that he knows Bert isn't going to make him buy a bill of goods.

"Oh, well, such is life," he cackles. "You'll be swinging in here with a new line pretty soon, and I'll promise you an order now—except it's shoes! Don't you ever come at me with shoes, Bert, if you don't want the madam here to collect on her life insurance."

Minnie, to be polite, asks him what his trouble is, but Bert butts in ahead of him with the answer.

"T. B. got stuck with a wagon load of those fancy cloth tops they put out a year ago. Thought he was going to shoe all the Normal girls and get rich; but they didn't fall for them."

"Eighteen dozen pair of four-dollar shoes taking up shelf room for nothing," mourns Rickey. "Look at 'em!"

He steps inside the door and waves his hand at two sickening long rows of shoeboxes up next the ceiling. Bert and Minnie follow him in. There's a curious little frown playing between Minnie's eyes as she views the display, and then she glances down at her trim little foot in its white kid boot.

"And you couldn't sell them to the girls?" she asks, puzzling over the question. "All these girls, and you couldn't sell them?"

"I marked 'em down to three dollars, and couldn't do it—only a few pair," says Rickey fretfully. "These girls act like a flock of sheep. If you can get the right one to start a style they'll all follow; if you can't get the right one it's like blowing feathers out the window—they go every which way."

"Oh!" says Minnie softly. "And who is the right one, Mr. Rickey, in this fine school you have here in your midst?"

"Sally King," Rickey speaks up promptly. "She's from Rock Hill, and her father is worth money—ten thousand, some say. This is her senior year, and if you were going to be around a spell you'd see most of the girls putting up their hair like she does, and copying her dress."

"Why didn't you start on her with your fancy tops?" Minnie begs to know. She seems to find his conversation interesting.

"Because I've not got the sense God gave geese, ma'am," he sneers at himself. "My daughter Mamie is a day scholar up to the Normal, and I started in with her. That settled it. Sally King wa'n't going to let any junior town girl set the pace for the school, specially as Mamie was kind of aiming at the class presidency that year. Sally went on wearing low-cut canvas whites plum up to frost, and the others followed. It used to look like a snowslide coming down the street!"

Bert knows this story by heart, having heard it every trip he's made to Oakville since the thing happened, and now he grins and says to Minnie:

"And that ain't all of it, by Jinks. There's four other stores in town stuck like T. B. here with fancy tops just because he—well, you heard what he said about the goosey ganders?"

Minnie turns loose that laugh of hers, and Rickey melts to it as much as an old lemon like himself can do.

"You've a real bright little boy there to bring up, ma'm, if you can teach him his manners," he gets back at Bert with his outlandish cackle.

"Suppose," Minnie says, still laughing, "I can teach him how to sell that line of shoes you've got up there: what, now, would you price them to him at?"

Rickey takes it for a joke.

"Don't push me," he replies. "I'll have to sleep on it."

"Min, quit poking around in poor old T. B.'s sorrows," Bert chaffs them both· "All those dogs are good for is to swell his inventory in case of fire. Come on. Let's go some place where there's no crêpe on the bell."

A bunch of schoolgirls giggle in through the door just here, and Rickey shows symptoms of wanting to break away. So Minnie says:

"Think it over, Mr. Rickey. I'm more than half in earnest. We will come in to-morrow——"

"To-morrow?" Bert lets out a surprised yelp; but before he can go on Minnie gives him a look, and remarks:

"Certainly so. I'm planning to see more of this pretty little city. Don't let us keep you, Mr. Rickey. Tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning it is," says Rickey, keeping up the joke; and he hurries off to see that his clerks don't overlook any bets with the Susie Anns.

* * *

MINNIE tows Bert out into the street, for he's kind of limp in his wits.

"What's the idea, honey bee?" he wants to know. "You've got me guessing, putting Rickey in the ring like this when we are going to the beach tomorrow. Tell me where I laugh."

Minnie draws him into a dark doorway at the foot of a flight of stairs leading up to some lawyers' offices.

"Bertie, my dear," she says to him, "we are going to turn this financial cloud that's hovering over us inside out and scrape the silver lining off it. We are going to put in this enforced vacation selling shoes."

"Oh, we are!" says Bert humorously. "Is it here I laugh?"

"I'm in earnest," Minnie answers. "I have a plan; but first you rustle around to all these stores that are stuck with fancy tops and find out, on the quiet, how much of a stock they've got. I'll be waiting for you at the hotel."

At this Bert, just like any fool man that isn't yet fitted comfortably to double harness, begins to champ his bit and prance some. I mean he kind of feels he's not the lead horse, as he'd doped his part out for himself, and it chafes him.

"Sell those dinky shoes!" he squeals. "Where? In a graveyard, to the other dead ones?"

Minnie pulls him a little farther in the doorway, where it's darkest, and pecks him on the lips.

"You dear boy!" she coos. "It all depends on you; I can't do a thing without you. And don't be long, for I'll miss you every minute. Hurry!"

She gives him a laughing little shove, and he frisks off like a pet lamb with a ribbon on its neck. Lord, what a lot he had to learn!

Well, he comes back in about an hour and he finds Minnie in the parlor as sociable as bread and butter with a sandy-haired young chap who is got up in a Kipperdorfer mail-order suit and an eyebrow mustache—a regular small-town heart twister. Minnie names him to Bert as Mr. Oscar Putney, and she says:

"He's Miss King's cousin, Herbert. Think of it, when I'm just dying to know her—the belle of the school!"

She beams on Oscar, and he pulls at the pin-feathers on his lip and looks guilty. Bert says "Is that so?" and rests his case there. He's not so awful smitten with this Oscar person; and he's wondering how Minnie came to strike up with him.

"We will call it settled, then, that you are to take me to see her tomorrow afternoon—shall we?" Minnie says, getting up and holding out her hand.

"About four, if that's convenient," Oscar promises. "I'll be right proud to do it," he smirks.

He practises a killing bow on her and skips away as jaunty as a new June grasshopper. Bert watches him go and turns to Minnie stiff as starch.

"I didn't know you had a friend in this town, Mrs. Vinton," he observes.

Minnie bursts out laughing. She's in such high feather at the way the cards are falling for her that she doesn't see Bert is miffed.

"Isn't it luck!" she gurgles. "I asked the clerk if he knew some one who could make me acquainted with Miss Sally King, and he brings Oscar in off the street—hails him in his car and stops him. He's a nice little fellow, that clerk. I want you to give him some good cigars, Bertie, dear."

Bert gets frostier than ever.

"It's Ben Holt's business to be nice to guests," he states; "but it's getting on pretty fast, it seems to me, when you go to making dates with a perfect stranger."

"Why, he's jealous!" exclaims Minnie, surprised clean through. "Jealous, when it's only the firm's business I'm trying to forward. You silly boy! Come on into our room and let me talk to you." And in two minutes she has Bert feeling sorry he'd ever had a hard thought for poor Oscar; he'd have loaned him money.

You are wise, of course, to Minnie's plan. If she's to get Sally King to start the style in fancy tops she must have a regular knockdown to her; come up on her from the social side, and let the business end slip in as though it's the last thing in her mind. And Cousin Oscar is the lad to set the wheels to going.

"That's all right," Bert says, when she finishes, "but these boots are two years out of style up North, and a whole year here in Oakville."

Minnie jumps up and parades about in front of him, pert as a pouter pigeon.

"Do I look out of style, Mr. Herbert Holloway Vinton?" she begs to be informed. "Well, then, if I wear a pair of tops to match this simple tan, what do you think they'll say to a match for my gray Jenny model, and that dear Georgette crêpe with navy blue?"

"You'll do that? Oh, by George, then I see a chance!" shouts Bert.

He tells her what he's learned about the shoes. Altogether there are fifty-nine dozen pairs of four-dollar fancy tops in town, counting in Rickey's eighteen. Nathan Rosenwald has the next largest stock—fourteen and a half dozen—and he's so sore it makes his teeth ache to mention them. The rest—Gaines, and Pratt, and Barber—are not much happier.

"Seven hundred and eight pairs of shoes," muses Minnie. "What did they cost a pair, Bert; did you find that out?"

"Two sixty; but you can gamble on it they'll jump at two," Bert answers.

"A profit to us of fourteen hundred dollars," says Minnie dreamily. "That wouldn't be so bad, Bertie, love."

"You're forgetting we've got to dig up fourteen hundred first to get the goods," Bert reminds her. "Suppose we don't have anything left but the hole?"

Minnie looks at him in the way a woman has when she wonders where a man hides his brains. But all she says is:

"I've a hundred on me, Bertie, not far from the floor. How much have you got?"

Bert grins and says:

"Mine's nearer my heart, chick—about a hundred and fifty, I guess. Why?"

"I don't know much about such things, but isn't there some way of getting, what do they call them—options—on these shoes?" Minnie asks, as if she wasn't quite sure of her ground.

"Why, by Jinks, of course!" barks Bert, wise as an owl all at once. "I never thought of that."

"Say for ten days," Minnie hints, helping him along till he can walk alone. "They'll go with a rush if they go at all."

"You pull Sally over on our side, and it's a cinch," whoops Bert.

He gets all fired up now with the idea, and pretty soon he's taking the biggest slice of credit for it. Minnie just smiles inside her head and lets him rave. She has "sold" him, and that's glory enough for her.

"All I need now," she says, "is some 4 A's to match my suits." She laughs till her eyes are blue as corn-cockles. "I'll buy them of Rickey after you are fixed up with him."

ert

WELL, the next morning Bert gumshoes around for his options; and he has to move quick so there won't be any time for gossip back and forth. He sees Pratt, Gaines, Barber, and Rosenwald, and hands out a line of mysterious talk about how maybe he can work the shoes off on some country trade he's heard of if he can get them at a price. That is precisely two dollars, take it or leave it, just as they please, he specifies; for the risk is all his, and he's not so horribly keen about it anyway. He ends by shoving a twenty-dollar bill at them for a ten-day privilege.

Of course they fall for it. Why not? Here's real cash dropping on them from a clear sky, and a chance to unload a dead stock at only a twenty-three per cent. loss. Bert signs them all up, putting in a provision that he can draw on the stock as needed, and then he skips away as chipper as a cock sparrow to close up Rickey. He has left him for the last because he's a hard nut to crack.

"Where's the missus?" Rickey asks him before he can start his spiel. "I thought she was coming too?"

"She'll be in later, T. B.; going to do some shopping with you," Bert says. "We sat up last night trying to figure out a way to sell those shoes of yours."

"Oh," says Rickey. "She meant what she said then? Well, let's hear it."

Bert makes his talk, but when he's through Rickey shakes his head.

"Nothing doing," he declares. "I've got to get my money back. It's two sixty or not a cent."

"Why, you old skate," Bert jeers at him, "the longer you hold on to those dead dogs the more you lose. At six per cent. on the investment you're already thirty-one dollars in the hole."

"I ought to add that in," says Rickey, screwing up his eyes. "Two seventy-five it would make 'em."

"Help!" yells Bert. "I knock under. Call it two sixty, and here's ten dollars for the option. It's throwing money away most likely, but I'll take a chance."

"Throw away another ten, sonny, and I'll go you," says Rickey, cunning as a fox, he thinks.

Bert makes a fuss over this, giggling to himself the while, and finally hands over the other ten. If he'd offered Rickey twenty first off he'd have wanted forty. That's his style.

Minnie is pleased as Punch when Bert comes bouncing in and reports what he's done.

"I wish I could dope out some way to make T. B. sweat for that sixty cents," he winds up. "I'd like to trim his feathers for him."

Minnie laughs.

"We'll see what happens," she says. "We haven't sold a shoe yet. We are going to buy some first. Come on with me to Rickey's."

"Here's my first customer, T. B.," Bert grins at him when they saunter in. "But there's nothing in it for me; two sixty is all she'll pay."

Rickey starts to cackle, then chokes it off. He gets a hunch he can't figure out right then.

"What are you wanting fancy tops for with those swell white kids you're wearing?" he inquires of Minnie.

"Why," she says, "I thought I'd save these till I get back to the city. They cost me eight dollars."

Well, Rickey fits her himself, and Minnie notices he's thinking hard. Once he half stops, as if he was minded not to go on; but he does, and Bert pays him two sixty a pair, and tells him to note it on the option so as to make the tally right. Rickey hesitates a second—they remember this afterward—then pockets the money and remarks—

"I reckon you'll be going away today, Bert, hey?"

"Why, no, not today," Minnie speaks up for him. "You are not anxious to get rid of me, are you Mr. Rickey? It has been such a pleasure to know you."

She smiles till the old sinner squirms like an eel and swears he hopes she'll settle down in Oakville for life. They have the shoes sent to the hotel, and Bert proposes to take Minnie around to meet his options.

They go into Pratt's first—ten dozen pair he has—and who do they run into but Nathan Rosenwald. It seems he's been the little busy bee to improve the shining hour. He's called on Gaines—six dozen—and on Barber—ten and a half—and now he's here comparing notes with Pratt. Bert greets them cheerfully.

"I got Rickey too, boys," he announces. "The happy family is complete."

"Rickey! Oi, there's a fine feller!" sniffs Rosenwald. "I bet you he holds the lacings out on you."

"Not while I've got my eyes," Bert answers. "Let me introduce Mrs. Bert, gentlemen. She married money, if you want to know."

They laugh and shake hands with Minnie, and Pratt says:

"We can't figure it out, Bert. You've taken on a big-sized contract for a back number shoe; I can't see where you get off."

"I can't either—not yet," Bert grins. "I'm waiting for something to happen."

"Sure he is," puts in Rosenwald, making a face he thinks is a mocking smile. "He spends a hundred dollars in options, and sits down to wait for a happening. Oi, oi, I can believe that!"

"I wish I knew as much as you think you do, Rosey," Bert twits him. "Well, we must be moving. I just dropped in to show my wife off. If she wants a pair of f. t. s. you know the price. To any one else it's four hard iron men."

"To any one else—oh sure!" says Pratt, laughing at the notion. "They'll come up in a hearse, I reckon."

Rosenwald follows Bert and Minnie to the street and stops them when they are out of sight of Pratt's.

"How are you going to draw on these stocks, Bert—pro rata?" he inquires.

Minnie nudges Bert and says before he can open his mouth:

"We'll have to think it over, Herbert. It would be a lot of trouble that way. Perhaps we'd better begin with Mr. Rickey; he has the largest stock."

"Rickey! That hog?" Rosenwald lifts up his hands. "Wait, Mrs. Bert. Perhaps there's a way, eh? Perhaps I make a lump sum for my stock, or something; and you draw all the same. Don't do anything until you see me first."

"Very well," Minnie answers serious as sin. "We'll bear it in mind, Mr. Rosenwald." And when they leave him she exclaims: "There's your man, Bert! Work on him."

"Right you are, sweetness," Bert chuckles. "We'll put him through some steps."

They go on to Gaines' and to Barber's, and the talk runs along as it did at Pratt's, only neither of them has any proposition to make like Rosenwald's. As it's getting on to dinnertime by this, they go back to the hotel. Minnie finds a bunch of roses in her room with Oscar's card tied to them. "Four o'clock" is written on it.

"Isn't that nice of him!" Minnie gushes. "It's to show me he hasn't forgotten."

"Um," grunts Bert. "A pretty fresh guy, I call him. He don't seem to think I'm living."

Minnie smooths him down, telling him Oscar is nothing but a boy, and his flowers don't mean anything more than a baby blowing kisses at you. And how would she ever meet Sally if it wasn't for him, she wants to know.

So she has Bert once more feeling like a father to the poor young chap, and they flit down to dinner as spoony as a pair of love birds. Afterward Bert goes across the street to shoot a game of pin pool with a traveling man he has met up with who is waiting for his train. It's the four-twenty north, and Bert has time to lose five dollars before it leaves. You see, being so newly married he'd forgot it in the heat of chasing the ivories, and he's sore at himself when he comes to. A married man hasn't any business losing money.

Bert erupts from the pool-room just as Minnie is getting into Oscar's tin carry-all. They don't see him. Minnie is all dyked out in her Jenny model and shoes to match, and she's got Oscar's flowers pinned to her. She's about the biggest value inside a tailored suit you'd want to set your eyes on.

Bert gets that stuffy feeling in his chest again, and he stands still and watches them, through a green haze, toot off up the street. There's nothing he can do until Minnie has landed Sally, so he mopes around the hotel waiting for her to come back, and wondering how she'd feel if she found him stretched out cold in death. It acts that way on some people—matrimony—till the new wears off.

Well, about six o'clock Oscar slides up to the curb in his bus with Minnie and another girl in behind. Bert perks up when he sees this girl. It's Sally King, of course, for Minnie wouldn't be chasing around with any understudy. Things are beginning to move, he allows, and he hops out to the walk to meet them. Minnie makes him known to Sally, and says:

"Miss King is going to take supper with us, Herbert; and Mr. Putney. And afterward we are all going for a drive."

"Fine!" chirps Bert. "Come on in. The house is yours."

Sally laughs as if he'd said something cute, and he takes a fancy to her on the spot. She's one of these imp-eyed, saucy-chinned country girls that always get the red ear at a husking, sing solos in the choir, and set the village fashions. There's something about her that makes you want to tell her your secret thoughts—magneticism, I guess you'd call it—and it's easy to see why the girls at the school follow her like the tail does the dog.

Minnie takes Sally off to her room to prink up her hair for supper, and while they're up there she shows her, the way women do, her Georgette crêpe and other fixings, not forgetting, you can bet, the fancy tops—"Belle Bottines" she names them on the spur of the moment.

Right here a man would make a mess of it and do some slip-slop lying maybe; but a woman does it different. Minnie doesn't make any pow-wow about those shoes. She lets it seem as if of course Sally knows what the proper caper in the latest styles is.

"But they had them here a year ago!" Sally cries.

"That's the funny part of it," Minnie says. "You know how it is some seasons; a style doesn't take, but the next year—well, you see I am wearing them."

Sally looks at Minnie's nifty foot in its pearl-gray top, and her eyes grow sort of wistful. It's the psychological moment, and Minnie nabs it.

"I'm going to tell you something, my dear, but it's in sacred confidence," she whispers. "My husband found the stores here were carrying on their shelves—think of it, not in the windows—a very good line of Belle Bottines, and he went around and got an option on them. Now when these storekeepers wake up and find there's a demand for the shoes Herbert will make a little something on every pair they sell. Wasn't that smart of him? But then he's a wonderful business man."

She changes the subject and rattles on about other things; but pretty soon Sally comes back to the shoes.

"I've a blue taffeta and a maize crêpe de Chine I got in Roanoke," she says. "I wonder——"

She stops and wrinkles up her nose like she's studying something.

Minnie takes her by it, so to speak—her nose, I mean—and leads her to the hurdle.

"They are easy to match, you dear child," she proclaims.

"And of course for you I'll make Bert knock off the profit. Only don't go to Rickey; Bert dislikes that man."

She says to her self, "Now Jump!" And Sally does.

"Rickey!" She tosses her head. "I should say not. I wouldn't spend a cent with him. I'll go to the other stores."

Well, they come down arm in arm to the parlor where Bert and Oscar have been as lively with each other as a game of chess.

Minnie gives Bert the high sign, and it sends his spirits climbing. After supper, when they go motoring, he carries on with Sally in the tonneau as if Minnie wasn't more than a sister to him. Sally is game and gives him back as good as he sends, and they make a riot of the ride between them, with Minnie and Oscar in the front as merry as the sad sea waves.

When they get home that night and are in their room again, Bert and Minnie, he says:

"Now tell me about it, Min. When Osky took you in to see her what did you say?"

"Oh, only that I wanted to know a girl the others were so crazy about," Minnie answers, sort of weary like. "Salve did it, that's all. She introduced me to a lot of girls, and I guess my get-up caught them. Anyway, they stared at me enough—and at my shoes."

"And they saw a mighty pretty pair of trotters," exclaims Bert.

Minnie doesn't rise to this, but just goes on and tells him in a few short words how she fed the fancy tops to Sally, and the rest of it. She doesn't seem specially enthused, but Bert fails to notice this, being all lit up himself about it.

" 'Belle Bottines,' Bully!" he cheers. "The stunt now is to get these ginks to put 'em in their windows."

"That is up to you," Minnie says in a hard little voice. "I've done my part. Now you and Miss King go ahead."

Bert can't see the signs the good Lord provides for him, so he pipes out:

"Say, Min, that girl is all right—what? Bright as buttons!"

"She certainly is not backward with strangers," Minnie answers with a lift of her shoulders. "If she could see more of the world it would be better for her." As she says this she unpins Oscar's flowers from her belt and tosses them on the table.

"Why, she's a traveler!" Bert grins. "Been to Richmond and Norfolk, and once, by Jinks, to Atlanta, Georgia. She told me so."

Minnie doesn't seem to see anything funny in this at all, but keeps on silently taking off her things. Bert continues on his merry way.

"She's enough sight better company than Osky—Sally is," he states. "That lad is chatty as a clam. I was sorry for you, Min, tonight, 'pon my word."

"Mr. Putney is a gentleman," she shoots back at him. "He knows how to behave himself in the company of ladies." She lifts his bouquet from the table, and sets to work tenderly arranging it in a pitcher of water. "And if I must say it, Herbert," she adds, "the way you acted with Miss King in that car was—I can only call it vulgar!"

Bert, who is first surprised then mad, sings out:

"Vulgar! Oh, I don't know. We were only larking. I don't see anything so fierce in that."

"It seems not," says Minnie, snuggling her nose down in the roses.

"Huh!" snorts Bert. "If you want to know what I call 'vulgar' it's sending flowers to a married woman you haven't known thirty minutes—and she wearing 'em!"

"Herbert Vinton! You insult me!" Minnie blazes at him. "I did what I did for your sake, and this is the thanks I get. I'll never forgive you for it!"

"Don't!" he yowls, and slams out of the room.

It's their first quarrel. Minnie flings the flowers in the grate, and flops on the bed and has a cry—a woman, mind you, who could sell a check suit to a 44 and make her think she looked as airy in it as a fairy. Isn't it queer how little old cupid can knock the hard sense out of a good sound head with a spoonful of mush?

BERT comes back after a while, of course, but Minnie is so fast asleep, she plays, that the house falling down wouldn't wake her. In the morning she's as polite to him as a new French maid in the family. Bert is equally civil, and breakfast with them is a beautiful exhibit of their very best table manners.

"I think I'll see Rosenwald first about displaying the shoes," Bert mumbles as he gets up from his seat.

"A happy thought," says Minnie sweetly. "I trust you will have good luck."

"I could stand a little of that," Bert answers, and he marches off with a fresh grouch, for he'd kind of hoped she would offer to go along. "I'll show her I can sell these blamed old boots without any help of hers," he says to himself. "She'll see my smoke all right."

Nearly all the stores of any account in Oakville are on Center Street on the long block between Elm and Maple. Rickey's is the first on the left after you pass Elm Street. Below him, on the same side, is Pratt's, and then Gaines's. Over the way from Gaines' is Barber's, and coming back toward Elm, on that side, is Rosenwald's, sort of cater-cornered from Rickey's.

Rickey catches sight of Bert as he goes to cross over to Rosenwald's, and hails him. He has found out some things over night.

"Look here," he says. "About this option: I let the missus have three pair yesterday just to oblige. But it's all or none after this, understand?"

"Oh, is that so!" says Bert pretty short. for he's not feeling exactly humorous this morning. "You'd better read that option with your specs on. It says I can draw on the stock as needed."

"Show me," Rickey challenges, and pulls out his copy.

Bert pulls out his copy and—well, he'd forgotten to put in that provision as he'd done with the others. He had tripped up in his hurry.

"It was an oversight, T. B.," he claims. "I meant to put it in, of course."

"Well, you didn't," Rickey cackles, "and it will take five hundred and fifty-three dollars and eighty cents, cash, to stir another box from the shelf."

"All right, let 'em stick there!" Bert snaps at him, mad as a hornet, and walks all the way around the block to cool off and get his wits to working.

He wouldn't have Minnie know the slip he's made with Rickey for a farm. When he goes in to see Rosenwald he doesn't waste time sparring with him.

"You've a hundred and seventy-four pairs of fancy tops," he starts in. "They are optioned to me at two dollars. What's that lump sum you were jabbering about last night? Quick now! There's going to be something doing."

"Three hundred even," Rosenwald offers.

"Done!" says Bert. "Now, then, clear out the shoes from that window and put in the fancy tops—Belle Bottines is the new name for them."

Rosenwald lets the holler out of him Bert expects.

"Oi, I should compete against my regular line with a lot of below cost shoes! Am I crazy?"

"You will be if you don't do it," Bert yaps at him. Then he explains to him about Sally King and says: "I'm giving you the first chance at the girls. And you can cut down your loss on the shoes with a sale of hose. Make a display to match the tops. They ought to go like popcorn at a fair." To clinch the deal he adds: "Remember, Rosey, these shoes are mine while the option runs. You can't touch them unless I say so. If I go to Rickey——"

That's enough. Rosenwald sheets his window. Bert takes paint and cardboard. and being something of a sign writer he turns out a set of Belle Bottine show cards that would make a circus press agent curl up and die.

Well, about ten o'clock Rosenwald unveils his window. Bert has helped him, and it's quite a picture. People talk about it, and Baber and Gaines and Pratt come to have a look. Bert keeps out of sight, and they go away thinking Rosenwald has lost his mind. By and by Rickey strolls across and takes a peek. He goes away kind of thoughtful. It's the stockings mixed in with the shoes that get him; and the window cards. "Belle Bottines." It looks to him as if something is to be pulled off he isn't in on.

Bert sneaks out through Rosey's rear door with the idea of going back to the hotel. It's all up to Sally now, he allows. If she doesn't come to time his cake is dough. He's aching to talk things over with Minnie, and he's made up his mind to forgive her for the way she's acted and let it drop.

Just as he is nearing the hotel who does he spy but Sally coming toward him. She's a senior, and her time is her own outside of classes.

"Why, howdy-do, Mr. Vinton," she twitters. "I stopped in to see your wife, but she's out. I wanted her to go shopping with me—those Belle Bottines. Do you know, I dreamed of them last night!"

"That's curious," Bert says, all set up to find things moving so easy for him. "Rosenwald must have done some dreaming too. He's got a window full of Belle Bottines this morning. I guess an angel whispered to him you were coming. Can't I go along?" And he turns and foots it with her.

"Isn't it funny how behind the times these little places are?" she remarks, just like city folks.

"Awfully funny," Bert agrees, sober as a deacon.

They walk on chattering away as lively as two magpies, and Minnie sees them. She's in the jeweler's shop near the corner studying a line of scarf-pins with the thought of buying one for Bert as a peace offering. It looks to her like a date they'd made, and her chin goes up. She sweeps the pins aside and swishes out, leaving the clerk pop-eyed to know what has come over her.

But to get on to the finish. Rickey, who is keeping a watch on Rosenwald's, sees Sally and Bert go in, and he doesn't need a special communication to wise him. It's the same with Pratt and the others when they hear she's bought four pairs of shoes and hose to match. All of them get busy, except Rickey. Barbor even has a banner painted and stretched across his front advertising Belle Bottines.

You see Sally goes back to the halls of learning wearing a pair of the shoes, and right off the place starts to humming with the news. Some of Sally's particular chums cut classes and tear down town to get ahead of their particular chums, and these last are only waiting till four o'clock to get away themselves. In another day Belle Bottines will be spreading through that school like the measles; and the dealers know it.

At dinner Minnie shows only a languid interest in what Bert tells her of the doings. He's trying hard to make up with her, but she holds him off. Finally, though, she says:

"What's the matter with Rickey? Why doesn't he put out his shoes?"

Bert hesitates, then he ups and tells her about the faulty option.

"And for two cents," he finishes, "I'd leave the old scrape penny with the goods on his hands. The craze will be over in a week."

"A brilliant notion," comments Minnie, "throwing away three hundred dollars to spite your face. I should think you and Miss King ought to be able to manage him, you are so thick together."

The way she says it stands Bert up on his toes. He loses his head like a fool colt.

"You're a good one to make a noise about Sally King," he fumes. "If it wasn't for her how would we sell these shoes? Didn't you hunt her up, you and that monkey man Oscar? And now——"

"That is quite sufficient, Herbert," Minnie hisses at him. "I don't care to be made a spectacle of in a public place."

With this she gets up and leaves him, and they are worse off than before. Herbert doesn't come home again till night, and then they don't have any more to say than a pair of life termers in the same cell.

Well, the next day the rush for fancy tops is like a panic. The school-girls don't ask for leave—they take it; and they are such a mob the president can't expel them, for it would close the shop. If you asked a girl a question she'd answer "Belle Bottines;" that was all she knew. And the town girls catch the fever too, all but Mamie Rickey and her crowd. They go around backcapping Belle Bottines as if they were paid for it; but it don't stop the rush—not at first. Rosenwald has to get in extra clerks, and so do Pratt and Barber. Gaines, who has only six dozen pairs, sells out by noon, and cries because he can't get more to keep his line of stockings moving.

All this time Rickey is biting his nails and hoping he'll hear from Bert. He's ready now to make concessions to him, for he's losing money on stockings every minute. But Bert doesn't come near—he's hanging around the other shops—and finally Rickey gives in to temptation and puts his fancy tops on view.

The rush sets in on him too. He sells four dozen pairs of shoes and almost as many hose, and he goes home that night feeling so good he gives a nickel to a blind nigger who pretty near faints when he learns who did it.

Bert goes home likewise. As close as he can figure it, leaving out Rickey, he's made nine hundred dollars to date. Rosenwald and Gaines have sold out, Pratt has only half a dozen pairs left, and Barber about the same. Rickey is the only one that's got a stock, and Bert is tickled to death because he has come off his perch. Altogether he's ripe again to forgive Minnie and begin life anew.

But it's a wise husband that knows his own wife. When Bert comes in Minnie jumps up and throws her arms around him like he's been away a month.

"Such news!" she bubbles. "You can't ever guess it."

And Bert can't. She acts as if there had never been a sharp word between them, and it sort of stuns him.

"Sally has been here," Minnie bubbles on. "The dear! And she told me—it's a secret till she graduates—that she and Oscar—they're only second cousins—are engaged! She carried on with you in the car that way just to tease Oscar. Isn't it lovely?"

"Gee!" hollers Bert. "I thought somebody had left you a million."

"Stupid!" she laughs, and—oh, well you know how it is. Everything is hunky with them and the goose hangs high.

After they get through billing and cooing Bert tells her how much he's made, and what Rickey has done.

"I know," she says. "Sally and I went by his place; and Bertie, love, I've a plan I think will even you up with him."

Then she talks business for half an hour as cool-headed as old Amos Lowe himself. Her mind was at ease, you see, and she could use her brains again. Bert, when she's through, leans back in his chair and laughs himself sick.

"By George," he crows, "I'm only a piker beside you, Min!"

Well, in the morning Bert has a ten dollar chat with a law man, and afterwards he starts for Rickey's place. On the way Gaines stops him, grinning clear back to his ears.

"Say, Bert, this is the richest thing yet," he chuckles. "Mamie Rickey's set have put a kibosh on Belle Bottines, and old T. B. ain't doing hardly anything today. It's funny enough to print, doggone me if it ain't!"

"Do it," Bert advises. "I'm on my way to cheer him up."

He finds Rickey looking as sour as persimmons, but he makes believe he doesn't notice it.

"Hello, T. B.," he calls out. "I've come for my shoes. Let's see, there's eighteen dozen, less a quarter—the three pair you sold my wife. Just get them down for me, will you, and we'll settle up."

"I've sold fifty pair," says Rickey. "You can count them out, and deduct seventy dollars from the bill."

"Hold on there," Bert says, growing serious. "My option calls for two hundred and sixteen pair, less three. I want that many."

"Well, I ain't got them," growls Rickey. "Didn't I just tell you I had sold fifty pair?"

"What's that to me?" Bert asks. "I didn't give you leave to do it. I want what my option calls for. It's all or none, understand? You made the terms."

"Now see here, Bert," Rickey answers, beginning to turn a sickly orange color. "Your wife wouldn't act like this. She's a lady——"

"You bet she is, and that's why you'll leave her out of this," Bert barks at him. "Come across."

"Oh," snarls Rickey, "so it's sharp practice you're up to, is it? All right, try it on!"

"Sharp practice!" roars Bert, high and mighty as a lord. "We'll see if it is. I'm just from Reynolds, the lawyer, and I know my rights. You'll hand over that lot of fancy tops, Rickey, or I'll have an attachment clapped on you."

"I haven't got 'em all, I tell you again," Rickey snaps.

"Well, you've got the cash," Bert snaps back at him. "Write me a check for four hundred and twenty-six dollars, and I'll call off my dog."

"What?" howls Rickey. "That's only two dollars a pair!"

"Exactly," cuts in Bert. "I'm ready to take up my option; you can't deliver the goods. Play or pay. I'll give you thirty seconds."

He takes out his watch. Rickey studies him for ten of his thirty seconds; then he lets rip an oath and reaches for his checkbook.

That's all. Sally and Oscar take Bert and Minnie to the train for Virginia Beach that night after a blowout supper at the Oakville House. Minnie gives Sally a friendship ring set with pearls to salve her conscience, and Bert gives Oscar a box of real cigars. As the train pulls out Minnie wiggles her little foot in its Belle Bottine, and says to Bert:

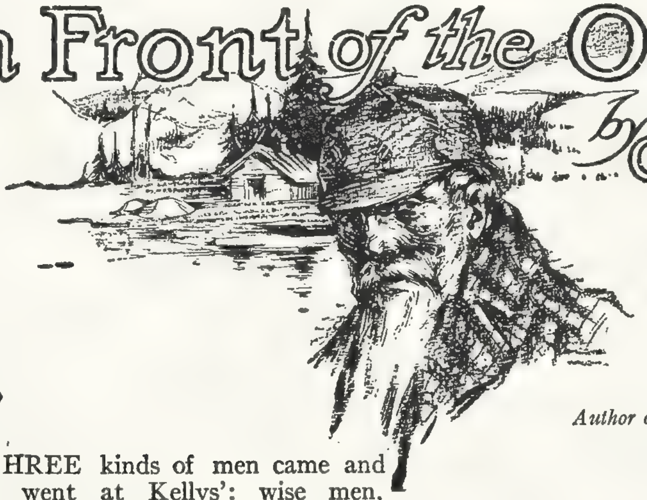
"Thirteen hundred dollars for three days' work: Bertie, darling, you are a wonder!"

"Oh," says Bert carelessly, "it wasn't such a stunt. It's knowing how to do these things, that's all. Poor old T. B.! If I ever make this town again I guess I'll have to cross him off my list." He laughs fit to kill, and Minnie gazes at him as if he is the only thing in pants.

Can you beat Bert's luck—any way you look at it?

In Front of the Other

by George L. Catton



Author of "Old Dad," "Thirty Ounces," etc.

THREE kinds of men came and went at Kellys': wise men, fools, and old Edward Carey.

Wise men brought a prospector's knowledge of granites, synite, pyrites, and gneiss, a little roll of legal tender in an inside pocket, and a pair of hawk's eyes. Fools relied on luck.

Wise men went up the river the minute the ice came down, to come back in early if they missed, and pan another stake from the bed sands of Moccasin Creek. Fools went up against the current any old time, and didn't come back—occasionally.

Wise men struck, staked, cleaned up in a hurry and went out; or missed three times, wrote out for transportation and went anyway. Fools came and went, struck or missed, lived or died, just as luck whimmed. But old Ed Carey was neither a wise man or a fool. Old Ed was just plain simple. Ed stuck.

Old Ed's creed was faith—without a limit. Adversity fed and fattened it; time merely ripened and refined it. And luck—old Ed claimed—

"There ain't no such animal."

"The gold's here, ain't it?" he'd say. "And if I keep on looking for it, I'll find it some day."

And maybe you'd tell him he had more faith than you. He'd smile, then.

"It ain't faith, it's logic!" he'd come back. "Muskoka, Ontario's a long ways away from this here Yukon country, but if I started to walk it and kept putting one foot in front of the other, I'd make it some day, wouldn't I?"

He was Bleeker, "Professor," the boys called him, who suggested that he might peg out before he got there.

"Then they'd ship me home in a box,"

the old man grinned; "and I'd get there anyway."

Faith was old Ed's creed. Fifteen Yukon Winters didn't even chill it; fifteen lost-time trips up against the current of the river didn't grind a wrinkle in it; and after he passed on, men who missed would wade out into Moccasin Creek with their pans, and a smile on their faces, and quote old Ed—

"If I kept on putting one foot in front of the other, I'd make it some day."

Old Edward Carey was sixty years, gray haired, and flat broke when he trailed in at the tail of the first rush. His grin, his faith, and two weeks' grub totaled his stake; but he had a worth-while incentive.

Ed owned a hundred acres of big rocks and piles of little rocks in Muskoka, Ontario. All his life he had been simply contented to guide an eternal plow-share through the pockets of Summer earth before the rock ridges, and swing a worn ax in snow-buried woods. But when his old lady died and his son Will brought home a little lady of his own, the old man gave his hundred-acre stone-quarry a once-over and communed with himself. Somehow it didn't seem quite square that Will and his missis would have to grub their lives away for a bare existence as he and "Mother" had done.

The old man was bent with hard work and hoary with making distant ends acquainted. His future now was the present. When he finished with that and put his foot in the last furrow, his old lady was going to take his hand and ask—

"How's Will?"

And he was going to say——

OLD ED sold the few head of stock that weren't absolutely essential to the young couple's existence and got out. When he landed at Kellys' broke, he didn't lose any time grieving over it. He started right out putting one foot in front of the other.

Three days later he was half-way to his wabbly old knees in the cold water of Moccasin Creek; and by the time the wise men began coming in, he's washed out a stake—at about four bits a pan—threw up a shack, and was cutting his Winter's wood.

The wise men grinned. Professor Bleeker swung his canoe over into the eddy below the shack and called to the old man.

"What's the idea of the bungalow, dad?" he queried. "Going to start gardening, or raising chickens?"

Old Ed returned his grin.

"Headquarters," he replied. "You see, I might be up here a year or two, and it'll be cheaper batching it here than boarding down to Kellys'. And I've got to have a permanent address for my mail, anyway."

Professor smiled and paddled on down. From his practical knowledge of placer deposits, and his experience of the Summer, the old man's year or two was more likely to be five or six; or, as he put it himself: "till hell freezes over." And to hear him talk of his permanent address and his mail was amusing. One would think he was Big Business, with the postman making four daily deliveries, instead of his having to go down to Kellys' for a possible letter that came in twice a year—some years.

Yet when Professor started up the following Spring he swung his canoe over into the eddy below the shack and yelled to the old man. There were two letters down at Kellys' waiting for Ed. His son Will had written him twice telling him to come home.

Professor didn't get an answer. Early as he was, old Ed was three days up the river ahead of him. Professor spent the night in the shack, and the next morning when he slipped his canoe into the water he stopped for a moment to examine the bed sands of Moccasin Creek from which old Ed had panned his stake. Fifteen minutes later, with a puzzled expression on his face, he turned into the creek and paddled slowly up for a couple of miles. Scores of times others had done that. Then he came back down and crossed over to where the other stream tumbled in opposite.

Old Ed was gone forty-six days—as long as his grub lasted. When he came back he was five years older than when he went up. Just across the river from his shack, Professor Bleeker was taking out ten perfectly good ounces every twenty-four hours, and that bank of the river was staked out in five hundred foot claims for a mile each way.

Old Ed crossed over and congratulated Professor.

"Must have walked right over it, myself," he grinned. "I cut down all these trees you see missing around here and floated them across for firewood."

Professor smiled understandingly.

“Any luck?” he queried.

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

“But I’ll find it next Summer!” he grinned.

THE next day old Ed hustled right out with his pan, but by the time he had another stake it was very evidently too late to go up the river again. The following Spring he lost three weeks filling in the hole in his poke that his Winter’s grub had cost him. Yet late as he was, Phil Barry was behind him.

Phil was a fool and relied on luck, and this was his second trip. He swung over into the eddy below the shack and yelled for the old man. He wanted to tell him that there were two more letters from Muskoka waiting at Kellys’ for him.

Finding him gone, Phil kept on up the river and cooked his coffee a mile above the shack. An hour later, when he spread his blanket, he found a spring-trap with a few bones in it, dragged half-way down into a hole at the foot of a tree. He pulled it out.

When old Ed came back down two months later, the last dark hair in the back of his head had ceased to be conspicuous, one of his three yellow front teeth was missing, and—and Phil Barsy had four shovel-stiffs working for him.

Old Ed climbed stiffly out of his canoe and shook hands with Phil.

“Missed it again,” he grinned. “Must have slept on top of it, too. Set a string of traps along here last Fall and lost one of them. Spent two days looking for it.”

Phil smiled; the trap was at the bottom of the river.

“Anything doing up the river?” he queried.

The old man shook his head.

“But I’ll find it next Summer,” and he climbed back into his canoe.

Next Summer!

Fifteen summers came and went. Fifteen Summers old Ed kept putting one foot in front of the other, while all around him wise men and fools came and went, struck or missed, went out or passed out, as luck whimmed. And every Summer brought the old man two letters from Muskoka asking him to come home.

Fifteen times old Ed waded out into the numbing waters of Moccasin Creek, panned his stake, and went up against the current—to come back down with just his smile, and his “But I’ll find it next Summer.” Fourteen times! The fifteenth time the old man didn’t paddle down.

Old Ed’s son got tired of waiting and worrying. He sold all the stock that wasn’t absolutely necessary and came up after the old man.

Will arrived just as the last of the ice was coming down. He bought a canoe and started up the river looking for Ed. The shack at the mouth of Moccasin Creek had stood vacant all Winter.

Will ran into the old man coming down at night. Just where the inrush of the creek met the current of the river, in the ever whirling eddy below the shack, the prow of Will’s canoe struck something soft and heavy in the water. He dragged it out on the bank and built a fire.

Old Ed had lived by his creed, and he had died putting one foot in front of the other. The few shreds of his moccasins and the condition of his feet told a tale, a tale of pumping feet in the snow; pumping feet that lacked the strength of youth and sufficient nourishment to pump themselves to beaten trails. But old Ed had come back down just the same.

Will didn’t have the money to take the old man’s body back to Muskoka. There were tears in Will’s eyes when he dug the grave.

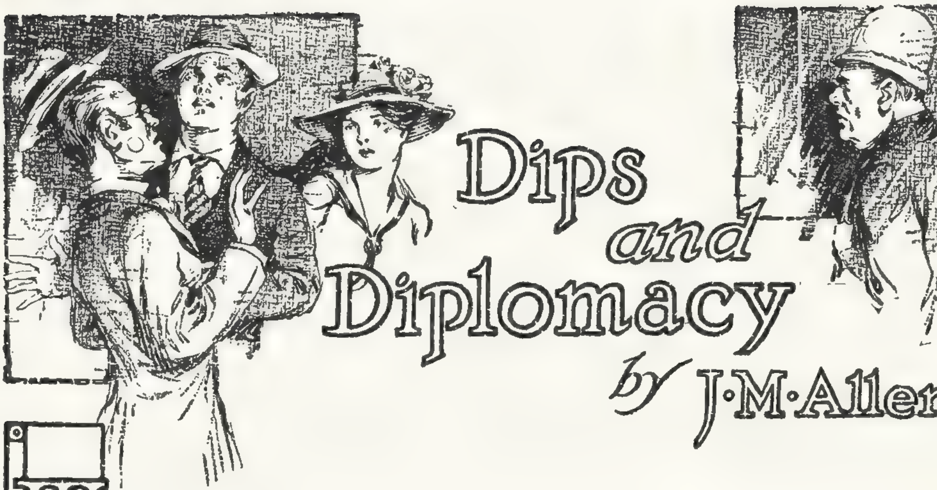
Just outside the door of the old shack where the old man had spent fourteen long Winters with his grin and his faith, Will went down five feet into the soft sand and—and took out two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It was the richest strike ever made at Kellys’.

And when old Ed put his foot into the last furrow and his old lady took his hand and asked him—

“How’s Will?”

The old man grinned and answered—

“Fine, mother!”



Dips and Diplomacy

by J. M. Allen

WICKWIRE says that diplomacy is the fine art of jollyin' the other guy into playin' your game. And there for once I'll string along with Wickwire, because that lets me qualify as a diplomat.

Wickwire said also that diplomacy was his longest suit and that was why he was a plain-clothes man and in position to tell common patrolmen like me where to head in. Maybe that's so too, but tellin' *me* where to head in don't call for much, because everybody around headquarters says there is too much solid bone in my make-up, especially above my neck. No, that don't make me mad—nor yet bein' called "Fog" when my name is Clarence, don't. But it's diplomacy and Wickwire I want to talk about.

Last week the town was jammed with three times as many visitors as could be decently accommodated, all come to attend the state fair. There was a special free attraction—an aviator guy called Jimmy Howe, who was to pull off one of his hair-raising flights a day the first three days of the fair—and that brought in everybody that was comin' by Monday night.

Business for the police picked up right away and we sure went to it. We had our catches sleepin' four to the bunk at the hold-over Monday night and thought we had everything framed for the peaceablest fair that was ever pulled here; so you may judge what happened to our goats when the chief bawled us out at Tuesday mornin' roll-call for a bunch of hitchin' posts that couldn't even catch cold. He said that a dip or bunch of dips had gone through the Monday night crowd for swag enough to fill a box-car, if he could believe all the screams that came over his 'phone, and to cap the climax the mayor's watch had been lifted while his Honor was walking from his office door to his car. Where were we when all this was goin' on? Watchin' for the air-ship? Or sittin' somewhere restin' our feet? Well he'd tip us off to one thing: if we wanted to stay on the pay-roll we had better get our eyes open and put up a fair imitation of doin' police duty, because he figured either to break up the pocket-pickin' or else break every man on the force and that before the week end.

And, glarin' at us one by one, he turned up his nose and swung on his heel.

I WAS turnin' this sizzlin' earful over in my mind about ten-thirty when I spied a young couple comin' toward me. That they was from the country, or a country town I could tell a block away from the interested way they lamped the six-story buildin's; that they was sweethearts and proud of it, I saw when they got close enough to catch the look of joyful contentment on their faces. Also he had her arm clamped tight through his own—at ten-thirty A. M.

He was a big-boned, good-natured, good-lookin' country youngster and I'd have wasted another half-minute lookin' at him only the girl caught my eye. She was a slender wisp of a girl in a neat but 'way-out-of-date dress, with a good fresh air complexion. There was a peaceful smile of pure joy on her face at the time but for all that I saw that her usual expression—and readin' expressions is my long suit—was mighty sad.

I figured that she must have suffered a whole lot at some time in her life. But at that she was good-lookin', especially with that contented smile lightin' up her face.

I ain't got any steady, now, in fact I'm mighty near the age limit, so I turned as they went by and was envyin' the youngster to my heart's content, when a man crossed the street and stopped at the curb two feet from me. It was an old gent I'd seen once or twice that mornin' already, and had catalogued in my mind as a pillar of society in some short-grass community, who was takin' a holiday and ready for any sort of sport that bobbed up. A little under medium height, quietly dressed, iron-gray hair, spectacles and the neighborliest smile that ever twinkled an eye, backed my first judgment of him, and I gave him back a good mornin' as hearty as the one he wished me. Get me? I liked his looks.

"Great day for the air flight, officer," says he.

"Fine," says I, givin' him the twice over.

"Must be a tremendously interestin' spectacle," he went on like a man who needed somebody to talk to.

"Oh, so-so," says I; "did you miss the flight yesterday?"

"Yes," he answers; "my train was late and I didn't get here till noon. I am principal of a school in a little town a hundred and fifty miles southeast of here, and when I heard that Jimmy Howe was to fly for you people I gave myself a holiday and came over specially to see it. I have never seen an air-ship and besides I knew Jimmy Howe almost in his babyhood, though I hadn't seen him for fifteen years till yesterday. His father and I were close friends. So you can see I'm havin' a quite lively time."

"I should think so," says I. And then I noticed that his stick-pin—a nifty-lookin' pearl it was—was half-way out of his tie. "Better fasten that pin before it strays. Or better still, stow it away in your furtherest inside pocket till you get back to the school, because there's some mighty slick dips in town this week."

"Dear me! Is that so? But wouldn't it be as safe if I should buy one of these patent devices for fastenin' them that the jewelers advertise? I'm very fond of it."

"Oh, suit yourself," says I "but if you are goin' to buy a fastener for it, you'd better do it right away—and hold your hand on the pin till you get to the jeweler too."

The crowd was gettin' thicker every minute and as I glanced up the street I saw the lovin' couple makin' it back again. The old gentleman had a slant up and down the street and one over the tops of the buildin's in the direction of the fair-ground where the air-ship was due to appear in a few minutes. Then he says:

"I'll take your advice. And I'll hurry, too, because I don't want to miss one second of Jimmy's flight. He told me to station myself in this block and he would give an extraordinary exhibition directly overhead and just for my benefit. Of course I tried to persuade him to take no such foolish risks, but just the same, such a mark of esteem from a noted man like Jimmy Howe, to an obscure school-teacher such as I, is flatterin'—ah, very, flatterin'."

He started on his way still smilin' proudly at me over his shoulder. The result was that three steps took him into a head-on collision with the lovin' couple who was studyin' the tops of the tall buildin's across the street.

The old fellow's hat was jarred off in the smash and all three got a fair to middlin' jolt. The old gentleman, gushin' a stream of apologies, was rescuin' his hat from the sidewalk in the midst of a circle of merry grins when suddenly his left hand went to his necktie and he straightened up like a shot and whirled toward me.

"Officer! Officer!" he yelled. "I've been robbed—robbed within this minute!"

And he pointed to his tie. The pearl had certainly disappeared.

The young fellow stared dazed at him for a minute but I noticed the girl take a swift look over her shoulder and step back toward the circle that surrounded them.

"Just a moment, young lady," says I to her, pullin' her gently back beside her beau so that she faced the old gent. "Now, sir," says I to him, "do you mean to——"

"Of course I do," he cut in excited to the limit. "One of these two has my pearl pin. You saw me push it into my necktie not a minute ago. Then they ran into me and stole it in the confusion. I demand that they be arrested—I'll swear to the complaint, I believe the woman has it."

But at the mention of the woman the young fellow came right out of his trance.

"Why —— you, —— your soul!" says he in the perfectly genteel tone that introduces murder and mutilation; but I caught his drawn-back arm just in time to twist it over so that his lunge didn't hurt anybody but himself.

"Go easy," says I, holdin' him helpless, "and you'll last longer. Let's all go down to the station and talk it over with the sergeant."

"But —— him," groaned the boy with helpless tears in his eyes and white with pain, "he says—" but the woman cut in:

"Oh don't Jack. It's all a horrible mistake. Let's go quietly and get it over with."

"That's the sense of the meetin'," says I; "let's get it settled quietly." And motionin' the old gent to go ahead, I led 'em through the crowd and on down to headquarters.

The young fellow give tongue to his feelin's pretty free after I eased up on his arm when we were clear of the jam. He told me who he was and what a whale of an influential daddy he had, and give me his solemn word that this outrage was goin' to be evened up if it took his old man's last dime. That old gray-haired scoundrel should be sorry that he was born; and as for me, the least thing I must expect was to lose my job; and when the brass trimmin's were off of me I'd get the dadblamedest lickin' that ever a man had.

But the woman said nothin' and so got most of my attention. A hard, set look had come into her eyes, and a little frown into her forehead; her lips tightened to a straight line and her shoulders sagged.

She looked pretty much like the female defendants look when the jury brings in a verdict of guilty. I suppose, since I was almost certainly takin' in a couple of dips caught with the goods, I ought to have felt pretty pleased with myself; but I wasn't—I was downright sorry for that girl.

The chief and Wickwire was just about leavin' as the four of us come in.

"What yer got, Fog?" says he after lookin' the bunch over sharply.

"A couple o' dips, I guess," says I, steppin' over to him and lowerin' my voice so as not to interrupt the sergeant who was about bookin' them. "The old guy is the complainin' victim."

"Good for you," says he. "How much you got on 'em?"

I motioned the old gent, who is answerin' questions for Wickwire, over. He'd cooled down considerable by now.

"Tell the chief just what come off," says I. Which he did.

"H'm," says the chief. "Neat work and mighty nervy, with Fog here standin' ten feet away. They mistook him for a hitchin' post I guess." Wickwire whispered somethin' to him. "Say, Pete," he called to the sergeant, "through with the woman yet? I want to take her up-stairs when you are."

"Just through," says Pete, "and about to ring for the matron."

Without a word, and showin' no excitement whatever, the girl turned and come toward us.

"Pretty cool article," murmured Wickwire, watchin' her close. "I'd say she's been through this sort of thing before."

It did look that way—I had to admit it to myself. And yet—and yet—oh, confound it! I couldn't get it into my hard nut that the girl was just a common crook. She didn't have enough to say for herself for one thing. And then, she didn't act the part—not all of it. And by now I was just naturally itchin' to get some sort of line on her. So I took a long chance on the chief's good humor.

"Chief," says I, catchin' his sleeve as he turned to follow Wickwire and the girl into the hall, "do you mind if I sit and listen a minute or two while you and Wickwire sweat her? Just a minute or two to settle one or two notions I got."

"Fog," says he grinnin' at me, "don't let anybody fool you into believin' that you could ever have two notions at one and the same time—not until your bean's been excavated. But if you really want to hear this jane sidestep questions for exactly five minutes, while you rest your poor tired feet at the city's expense, I'll humor you just this once. Come up."

"May I, too, sir," cut in the old guy. "It's the first adventure of this kind I've ever had; indeed these are the first specimens of their class I've ever had an opportunity to observe, and naturally, and entirely aside from its sociological aspect——"

"Wait," rasped the chief, "you can come. Them last words done it. But can the rest."

And so we line out up-stairs and into the chief's room. Wickwire set the girl by herself at one side of the table and facin' the boss who sat on the other side. He himself took a seat at the chief's elbow. Me and the old guy grabbed the first seats inside the door. For a minute after we was all seated not a word was said, the boss givin' the girl a steady once-over calculated to get on a guilty party's nerves, and the girl, her face the picture of weary waitin; givin' him back a look as steady. Wickwire's got on his favorite old sleuth front, but to me he looks pretty much like a man with a headache.

At last the chief begins—

"Where do you live, young woman?"

And she answers, "Marietta."

"Marietta what?" asks the chief. "What state?"

"This state," she answers, "in Logan County, sixty miles west of here."

The chief wrote that down.

"How long have you been in town?"

"We got here at half-past nine this mornin'."

"Where are you stoppin?"

"We are not stoppin' anywhere. We just come to see the fair and the air flight. We leave for home at half-past nine this evenin'.

"We—we," cut in Wickwire. "Who is we?"

The girl shifted her eyes to his and back to the chief before she answered:

" 'We' means the young man who was—was arrested with me and myself."

"What's your monniker and what's his," cut in the chief without lookin' up from his writin'.

Now this is one of the chief's cutest tricks. A respectable man or woman ain't supposed to know what "monniker" means, but a crook uses the word himself and will fall for the trap if it's framed for him proper.

I held my breath while I pulled for her to answer "I don't understand." But she answered—

"He is named John Miller and I am Jane Owens."

The chief had a small grin to himself as he went on with his scribblin' while Wickwire took up the work.

"Have you ever been mugged before?" And the girl, still ignorant of the trap, waits a second and then answers—

"No, sir."

The old guy has been grippin' the arms of his chair as hard as I have been grippin' mine durin' these questions and answers, like he's excited again plumb up to the limit. If it don't be for my sympathy with the girl I'd been amused at his fidgety interest. Her last answer seemed to be too much for him.

"A falsehood, sir," he whispers to me, "that answer is a pure falsehood. Her coolness, her self-possession—in short her demeanor is that of one who has had experience under similar circumstances——"

But my elbow in his ribs cut off further remarks, for the chief was askin'—

"How long 've you lived in Marietta?"

The girl answered—

"Five years."

"Your people live there?"

The girl's eyelids came down just the least bit, foxy-like, but her look held steady.

"No, sir."

"Where did you live before you went to Marietta?"

Her lips set hard together, and she didn't answer.

"I ask you," said the chief lookin' up from his writin', "where did you live before you went to Marietta?" And then she answered quiet but a little unsteady—

"I won't answer that."

"Why," he shot at her. But she answered again—

"I won't answer that."

I think the old gent was about to try relievin' his high pressure with another word or two in my ear; anyway he was fidgetin' again, so I jammed my elbow into his ribs again on suspicion.

"How," grated the chief, rough as pig-iron now, "how do you live in Marietta?"

"I'm a clerk in a store."

"Whose store?"

"Mister Miller's. Jack's — John's father's."

"But you won't tell where you came to Marietta from?"

"No."

"H'm. Well then I guess we'll just have to lock you up till we look you up. It's pretty sure you ain't on the level, because folks that are don't have nothin' to hide. Fog—" turnin' to me—"tell the matron to come and get this jane and search her while I chat with her man a bit. Wickwire, go get him and we'll see what he's got to say. As for you Miss Lightfinger, you are goin' to talk and talk free—and you won't be so very much older when you do it either. Now stick a pin there."

Feelin' pretty sick of the whole thing because every circumstance so far—her refusal to answer questions past a certain point, her fallin' for the chief's yegg patter, the disappearance of the old guy's pin when I myself had seen him fasten it snug into his tie thirty seconds before he collided with the couple, her workin' familiarity with police routine—all—everything went to show that I was just a bonehead sucker of the plain or garden variety, wastin' a lot of pity on a hardened Moll just because she could frame up a sad white front and watery lamps when caught with the goods—thinkin' all this over, I say, I stepped into the sergeant's room.

THE youngster was about through explodin' and almost through swearin'. The desk sergeant, payin' him no mind whatever was checkin' over what he'd took out of the youngster's pockets preparatory to storin' it in the safe. In the lot were two bits of buff-colored paste-board and, makin' free to pick them up, I saw they were return ends of round-trip tickets issued in Marietta the mornin' of that day.

It cheered me up quite a bit. And so I got another idea, like this: the chief and Wickwire, startin' with the notion that the girl was a crook, was sweatin' her to make her prove it to them. So, if there was somethin' in her past that might sound the least bit crooked in tellin', she'd naturally close up when the questionin' got to that neighborhood, and let them think what they liked about it. It might look bad, but anyhow it didn't prove anything against her.

On the other hand, if she was on the level *now* and could be made to believe that I would do my bit to get her out of trouble as free as I did to slide her into it, provided she could show me where she was gettin' the worst of it, maybe she'd loosen up a bit and I'd get a chance to do something for her. And that I wanted to do—silly as it seemed.

So, instead of hurryin' to my beat, I dodge down the corridor and let her and the matron pass to the women's cells. Then I ease on behind and catch the matron as she is turnin' the key. In thirty seconds the matron—bless her big heart—has swung back the gratin' and followed me in.

The girl was sittin' on the bunk when I went in, and the tears was runnin' down her face; but she wasn't makin' any noise whatever—just sittin' there cryin' helplessly.

I didn't have time though to soothe her or lead gently up to what I had to say because the chief up-stairs was thinkin' that by now I was on my beat, and there'd sure be serious consequences if I let him be mistaken long. So I begun right at the point:

"Young lady, I want to help you and I believe you need help. As the thing stands we've got a good case against you—at the least we've got enough to hold you over for a week or so. The old gent's complaint will do that. But I've got a hunch that maybe you are gettin' the worst of it, and if you are I'll do my bit to help you out provided you can make me see it.

"Now if you think I'm just stallin' so as to get you to loosen up—why I'm sorry and—good day. But if you can see that I'm just tryin' to give you the same chance to prove your innocence that they've got to prove you're guilty, then you'd better tell me what you'll have to say to his Honor in the mornin' and let me rake together as much evidence as I can get to prove it. And be quick about it, for I'm supposed to be on my beat right now."

She didn't hesitate a minute, but at that she didn't brighten up a shade.

"I need help, yes—your help or any help—but what can it do. I didn't get the pin—I didn't even see it. That's all I can tell the judge. But how can I prove it?"

"That's where your reputation's got to count. It's your word against the old gent's, but if this is the first time anything of this kind's been charged against you, if your people are honest and your standin' good, why, there'll be nothin' comin' to you to-morrow but an humble apology. That is (and here I caught her eye and held it) if you can give a satisfactory explanation of how, an honest girl understands rogues' patter such as 'monniker' and 'muggin'.' You did, you know; the chief tried you out with them and you didn't even notice it."

A full minute after that she sat lookin' wearily into my eyes—like she was tempted to tell all.

"He might—could help," murmured the matron; "better let him try." And then as if speakin' as much to herself as us the girl begun:

"Yes—I might as well tell, and I might as well tell you—they'll hold me here till they show me up, anyhow—I know the police. If I tell you, and you tell them it'll only get it over the sooner. So—" and now she faced me with wide eyes that gleamed—"if you are here just to snitch, sit pretty for you are goin' to have luck.

"My right name is Mary Corrigan, and I went to Marietta from Cincinnati five years ago. The police in Cincinnati have my description and photograph and I'm listed by them as a dip and a second-story worker and I've no alibi to offer. My father was a yegg before me—was a leader among yeggs as far back as I can remember—and so I went to the life naturally. My mother died when I was in arms.

"Father and his gang worked under the protection of a fly-dick named Sam Casper and as long as Casper got his bit and a fair slice for the guys higher up the law didn't meddle with us much. This Casper was a sharp guy and a hard one, but he was mighty necessary to us. But for all that we didn't have anything to do with him outside of business, because some folks said he had a drop or two of darky blood in him. I don't know whether that was right or not, but he sure had a lot of darky superstition and ways. Still, he worked with us all right, and one time and another we got away with lots and lots of stuff. But I—oh—after awhile I got to wantin' to be on the level—like other girls that I saw but couldn't ever hope to know. I wanted to have beaus that wasn't afraid to look a cop in the face. I—I wanted to be honest.

"About then a fly-dick that wasn't in the know got a little something on me and I was pinched and mugged before father and Casper could frame up an alibi for me. And so it looked like 'good night' to any chance ever to get on the level. And right then, to cap the climax, one night Casper told me he was stuck on me—and—and—well, I knew just what he meant, as well as his reputation. But dip as I was, I wasn't *that* kind of a girl, and I was telling him just what a beast I thought he was when he advised me to be careful for father's sake.

"And then he went ahead and told me that he had dreamed twice of seein' father naked, which he said was a sure death dream, and that he knew father had a crib all spotted to crack that night, and that he and another dick was next to everything. Then he told me that headquarters was suggestin' that he wasn't doin' much thief-takin' lately, and that to catch father—the main guy of them all—with the goods, would square him for a long time.

"So he put it to me that I'd talk turkey to him or else he'd give father a double-cross. And I knew father had a job on, but didn't know where.

"I guess I went crazy when the rottenness of all he said sunk into me—I know I wanted to kill him. And I tried to, but in a minute he held me as helpless as a child. He slapped me twice with his open hand and ran away, tellin' me that I could blame myself if he had to croak father. I set out right away to find father and warn him. But nowhere, nohow, could I get word of him, though I run and walked till I could scarcely stir. And just as I was sinkin' exhausted at home, they brought me word that father was dead. Casper and his pal had caught him at work and when father saw who was facin' him, he had whipped out his gun and cut loose. The bullet touched Casper over the cheek-bone, grooved the left side of his face and took the tip off his ear. His pal shot father twice, firin' from his coat pocket, so the paper said. I've never seen this pal that I know of, but the papers said he was called Ham because he'd been an actor.

"So Casper's dream come true. And the next mornin' for the first and last time in my life I snitched. I went to headquarters, waylaid the chief of police and made him hear me. I told him all of Casper's rottenness and he believed it. And out of his own pocket he gave me money to leave Cincinnati and drop out of sight so I could begin over and be honest.

"I left the next day after father's burial, with the one consolation that Casper and his pal had been fired from the force and had hiked out ahead of warrants for blackmail. And so, driftin' and lookin' for a favorable stoppin' place I came to Marietta.

"I've made good there, have made friends—decent, honest friends and—and Jack and I were to be married soon. But now they'll dig up Mary Corrigan, and Jane Owens is done for, forever. And Jack—oh, Jack will despise me—he may even *pity* me." And she boo-hooed at last.

A cryin' woman's got my goat from the start, so I mumbled whatever comfortin' thing I could think, in as few words as I could, promised her that I'd frame up some sort of way to help her or crack my bean tryin' and beat it. And I wasn't at my right self till I was back on Main Street and in the crowd.

Once there I didn't have a minute I could spare to figure on a way to help Mary Corrigan. Main Street was closed to all vehicles till after the air flight and so in the little while I'd been away the entire street had flooded with a whalin' big fair-time crowd—old guys and young cut-ups; country rubes and city dudes; old dames and fresh peaches—all—all was there and their kinfolks was with them.

Weavin' through all these comes the toy-balloon pedlers, the tin-whistle pedlers, the guys with candy walkin' sticks, and a dozen more street merchants with the catchpenny stuff, all brass-lunged, sharp and busy. Overhead fluttered and rustled all kinds of flags and banners and buntin'; and every three or four minutes up at the next corner, somebody would turn loose a balloon all black and shaped like a cat that would shoot up till the breeze over the house-tops caught it, and then turnin' round and round, float lazy-like away.

This was an advertisin' scheme figured out by some guys that had opened a new restaurant and called it the Black Cat Inn. The name of the restaurant was printed in white letters on both sides of the balloon. It got attention, all right, for while they was waitin' for the bird-man it was the only thing the crowd had to amuse itself with.

But pretty soon the cry went up "Here he comes," and every face turned toward the fair grounds. And sure enough there in the sky was somethin' lookin' pretty much like a mosquito at that distance, headed toward us and comin' like fury. In half a minute we could hear the hum of the machine, and in another minute here he was swingin' above us, with every face and every eye in that crowd pointed straight up.

I am lookin' as close as everybody else when suddenly it comes over me like a flash that here was the chance of a lifetime for a lively dip. Here was a crowd wearin' its holiday finery and jewelry and with holiday spendin' money in its pockets, lookin' straight up into the clouds and leavin' everything that tempts a guy to pick a pocket so handy for a willin' dip that it would have looked like flyin' in the face of Providence not to sort out what he wanted and take it. And it struck me that if I was a dip I'd hunt me up a bird-man somewhere and make every date that he made. I'd certainly have a chance to get rich.

So then I brought my eyes down to the crowd and got into circulation among it to protect it as far as I could—and that was little enough under the circumstances.

Half-way up the block I ran across the old professor. He had his hat in his hand and was watchin' the bird-man open-mouthed. A farmer guy with a long sweep of tobacco streaked whiskers was standin' all but on his toes, but he was watchin' the bird-man, too, and neither seemed to know the other was on earth.

"Professor," says I "let me warn you again against pickpockets. Get your hands—both of 'em—into your pockets and keep them there till that bird-man is done."

"Thank you—thank, you, officer," he said, just slantin' at me once and then pointin' 'em up again; "isn't it wonderful what Jimmy is doin' up there?"

The old farmer heard me too but was a lot too busy to lower his eyes. Absent-mindedly his hand come up to his breast and felt for somethin' in his inside coat pocket, found it and then dropped back to his side.

His roll, thinks I. I hope no crook was lookin.'

A dozen feet away I turned to see if the professor had done as I told him. He had disappeared. And yet six seconds before he was so took up watchin' the bird-man he could hardly turn his lamps off the clouds.

Funny about that, thinks I. I worked my way to the corner where they was sending up the Black Cat balloons, crossed the center of the street and started back.

Midway of the block and in the middle of the street somethin' was comin' off out of the ordinary for a dozen or so people had got their eyes off the bird-man and was gangin' round somebody that was talkin' pretty excited. So in I went and was face to face with the whiskery farmer.

"I've been robbed," he says, almost cryin', "and robbed inside of the last five minutes—a hundred and twenty dollars in ten dollar bills—in a red-leather pocket-book—had it in my breast pocket here when you spoke to that old fellow right by me five minutes ago."

"Just so," says I. "Got any idea who lifted it?"

"Why no," he begun, whinin', "I——"

"Better report it to headquarters then. I can't help you find it now. Sorry." And I elbowed on.

Near the corner I met Wickwire.

"Well Foggy," says he, "how's everything?"

"Fierce enough," says I. "There's been one leather lifted so far that I know of and Gaud knows how many more that I'll hear about from the chief. Don't see how it's to be helped though, with this mob of yahoos rubberin' straight up and a gang of smooth dips ciculatin' through it."

"That's right," he sneered, "fix up your alibi now so you'll have it when the boss gets you on the carpet."

But I didn't get back at him, for just then I glimpsed the professor again, through the crowd. He was standin' near some swell-dressed dames, hat in hand and lookin' straight up like when I'd seen him before. The sight of him standin' so gave me a strange notion, for as my eye lit on him, his was leavin' me—or so I would have swore.

"Say, Wickwire," I says, "you remember the old guy that accused that girl of liftin' his sticker—that I brought in an hour or so ago? Well, I'm goin' to keep an eye on him; he's queer in too many ways. He was standin' right by the guy that was touched for the wallet and he——"

"Rats," he cut in, "that old gentleman crooked! Why he's a college professor. Next thing you'll be pinchin' a priest for liftin' leathers. You are sure dippy, Fog. Go ahead—I don't want to talk to you." And he moved off.

So I moved ahead toward where I had glimpsed the professor. He had disappeared. And the swell-dressed dames he'd been standin' by was workin' up toward the excited point, specially one of them who was rummagin' through a shoppin'-bag.

"My purse," she said to the others, "my purse is gone."

"Excuse me, madam," says I, "have you just missed it."

"Yes," she says, "it was in the bag. A moment ago I discovered the bag open and —and my purse is gone. It's a silver mesh and has my initials, B. J., engraved on the lid. The bag was opened within the last minute or two."

And that was all—nothin' like a clue for quick work because they had been lookin' up, too; so I took her name and address and beat it. But I knowed now that as soon as I got the chance I was goin' to cross-examine the professor a bit on my own hook. If he had come a hundred and fifty miles just to see that bird-man fly, then why the blazes didn't he stand still now and look at him. And two leathers had been lifted each within a yard of him, in the last fifteen minutes. Might be chance but— And oh, doggone it! When the chief was trappin' Mary Corrigan with that thief patter an hour ago, didn't he fall for it as hard as Mary? Didn't he? And him a professor in a country-town college! A professor—oh, yes.

I was so took up givin' the old guy the third degree in my mind that I'd clean forgot my job of protectin' the crowd till a thousand voices squealin', "Oh, look at him!" brought me to myself.

Slantin' up I saw the bird-man just about brushin' the clouds.

Suddenly the tick of the motor stopped, the nose of his machine tilted down and the next second he was droppin' like it was all over but the inquest. But in a minute we could see he was swingin' round as he come down—round and round—down and round —so it was all right. But gee, it was thrillin', and I rubbered as hard as the biggest rube in the crowd.

Down—down and around—he come, till we could see him plain, in gray jersey and blue breeches — around and down — and down—and down—and down till yonder he was two blocks away and just above the tops of the biggest buildin's; still further, further down; and then his motor began to put-put-put again as he leveled his machine, pointed her straight up the street and come skimmin' along fifty feet high.

The crowd howled itself hoarse while it stampeded from under and piled up on the sidewalks. And here he come as stiff and still as if he was part of the machine.

He didn't have on any of the leather outfit like the bird-men wear in pictures, so I got a good look at him. A lanky, swarthy, wiry-lookin' guy he was, with coal-black hair and a little curly mustache. And I noticed a funny streak on the side of his face, runnin' from just under the corner of his eye to his hair. And the upper third of his ear was missin'. Great Scott! And Mary Corrigan said——

But he had passed me now and was almost at the next corner, when up shot a Black Cat balloon. Slantin' it rose over the street, barely missin' the house-tops on the corner, and went slowly turnin' away.

Now there wasn't any too much room between the wing-ends of the air-ship and the buildin's, but as that balloon sailed across the street, suddenly the tail of that machine seemed to dip, the motor got faster, the ship went sharply up, swingin' round as she went, and ten seconds after the black cat crossed the street the air-ship, almost scrapin' the brick off the corner buildin' had left Main Street and was swingin' round toward the fair-grounds.

The crowd thought it was a part of the regular program and howled and squeaked its satisfaction. But me, well, I saw that the guy, at the narrowest risk of his life, had turned short of where that black cat crossed; I had noticed his crop ear; and Marry Corrigan had said that the guy that double-crossed her old man was either part darky himself or had been raised by the darkies and had all the darkies' superstition; so I didn't quite string along with the gang.

I wondered how could this guy's presence in town have anything to do with Mary's trouble. And that reminded me that I wasn't layin' for Mary's accuser, the professor, so I made my way through the crowd—that was startin' to go about its business now that the show was over—to the corner where the professor was due to turn on his way to the hotel. But before I got that far I met Wickwire again.

"Well, old Sleuth," he sneered, "have you pinched any ministers since I left you?"

"No," says I, "but I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do. A woman's purse was lifted while I was talkin' to you down there, and that professor guy wasn't a yard away from her a minute before she missed it. So, I'm goin' to wait for him at the corner there and ask him about several things. For instance, he told me he rode a hundred and fifty miles to see this air-man fly, but while the flight was comin' off he's been dartin' and duckin' round through the crowd like a kid at a church social. Then again he says he's a professor—and of a short-grass country college at that—and yet when the chief stalled at that girl with his thief patter, this guy was sittin' right by me and he fell for it as hard as she did.

"He's got to make me see how he come to do that. And then I'm goin' to ask if he minds lettin' me see an old envelope addressed to him in his home town—any one he may happen to have with him—and if he doesn't answer every question sharp and accurate; if he stops to study; or if even the post-mark on the envelope is doubtful; then to headquarters he goes and I'll turn him and my suspicions over to the chief and we'll see if I'm as dippy as you say."

"That's right," snarls Wickwire, "if you *must* be a fool be a —— fool. And now I'll tell you what I am goin' to do. I'm goin' to hunt up this old gentleman and tell him that an old acquaintance of his is waitin' for him on this corner. That ought to bring him to you a-runnin'. Then you give him the third degree right on the spot.

"I intend to be in hailin' distance when it comes off. Then when you've showed what a hundred per cent. ass you are, and the old gentleman is insulted and humiliated to the limit, I'll step up and ask him to come and file charges against you at headquarters. I'll take him to the chief myself, and when he's told his tale, I shall report that I warned you twice to let the man alone, and that in spite of that—and just remember I'm your superior in rank—you put in most of your time pussy-footin' after him while dips were friskin' the crowd right and left. You'll raise —— that's what you'll do—and off I go to make it easy for you."

INTO the thinnin' crowd he went. But every twelve or fifteen steps he took he'd turn and rubber over his shoulder to see whether I'd got cold feet or not. Which I certainly had not, for I knowed Wickwire was just simply chuckin' a bluff. And I knowed *that* because it ain't Wickwire's way to be tender with anybody. It would be more like him to get what dope I had and lay for the old gent and cross-question him himself. Then if anything come of it Wickwire would get all the credit at headquarters and in the papers.

So then, why was he handin' me the bluff? I figured it over two or three times while I waited, and by the time the crowd had thinned down to the ordinary fair-time bunch and I was certain my man wasn't goin' to pass my corner on his way to lunch, I got one of my wild notions and went to work from another angle.

But luck seemed to be against me. I walked down to the old guy's hotel, but the clerk—name Jimmy Mahan, and a friend of mine—said he hadn't been in since the air-flight. Jimmy raised his eyebrows when I told him to forget that I'd asked about the professor but I knowed he'd keep still. He's that kind.

Then I laid for Wickwire but he didn't show up. So there bein' nothin' I could do until I saw one or the other I slow-dragged over my beat, turnin' things over in my mind. First Mary Corrigan, then the professor, then the bird-man, then Wickwire. And while I thought I could figure up quite a way on the men, I couldn't see at all why Mary Corrigan was in trouble, unless the old guy really thought she got his pin. I couldn't connect crop-ear with the girl in any way because he must have been at the fair-grounds where his machine was kept, when she got to town. In fact I couldn't connect him with anything, although his crop-ear and the chance he took on breakin' his infernal neck before he'd let a black cat cross him, didn't leave me any doubt that he was Sam Casper of Mary's tale.

I fretted and studied over the bunch all afternoon, so you can tell if I probably had a grouch when along about time to go off duty I met Wickwire.

"I've called your bluff, Mr. Real-Wise-Guy," says I. "Why don't you make good? Where's your friend, the professor? I've looked for him on the street and at his hotel. I'm goin' to pinch him on sight, my little man, and I'll bet what all the sergeant takes out of his pockets won't look like either school-books or testaments. If I miss my guess I'll send in my star by a messenger boy. But this much you can write in your note-book—I am goin' to pinch the professor.

"It'll come off today if I lay eyes on him before I go off duty. If not today, then I'll drop in in the mornin' and snatch him out of his beauty sleep. So you can trot along and get the little speech ready that you are goin' to get in the game with when the chief puts the can on me."

Oh, he was mad, white mad. But I didn't wait for him to answer. After goin' half a block, I slanted back over my shoulder. He was headed in the opposite direction and goin' at a good gait. Two minutes later he had disappeared. Twenty minutes later I was at the old guy's hotel again.

"Yes, he's here," says Jimmy, leanin' over the desk so he could lower his voice. "But what's comin' off? Wickwire's just left here after visitin' with him a few minutes. Is the old guy a crook, or a detective, or what?"

"Ask me when I get back, Jimmy," says I. "I got to visit him myself a bit before I know. Wickwire is just around the corner now. We ain't together on this. Just show me which is the old guy's room and I'll run up and give him a glad surprise. Most likely he'll be glad to see me."

So Jimmy took me up two flights of stairs and pointed out the room to me, the only one that had a light shinin' through the transom. Also he mentioned that the room across the hall was Jimmy Howe's, the aviator. Said they'd been placed as close together as possible at their request, because they was old acquaintances.

Then Jimmy beat it and I pussy-footed down the hall to make my visit. The hall lights was burnin' now because it was just about dark outside. There wasn't a soul in sight.

Quietly I tried the knob. It turned free all right, but in spite of my pains the lock clicked. The next second the light in the room was turned off, for the transom went dark. So, reachin' for my flash-light with my left hand, I lunged against the door.

Another second and I was in the room, and the professor was blinkin' at me like an owl in the blaze of light I threw on him. He was standin' behind a little table in the center of the room and at his feet was an open travelin'-bag with the letters J. H. marked on the end. And he sure didn't look like any peaceful school-teacher with his lips drawed into a snarl, the edge of his teeth showin' and his eyebrows almost meetin' in a frown.

"What the devil! I beg your pardon, officer, but what does this mean? How dare you——"

"Oh, can it," I cut in. "I'm makin' a professional call. The chief wants you to step down to the station and explain that collection of bric-à-brac you got there." And I nodded at a little pile of stuff on the table in which among other things I noticed a red-leather pocketbook and a silver-mesh purse.

"Oh, he does—does he?" he says, turnin' his face aside as if the light is too much for his eyes.

At the same time I notice that his right hand has left the table where it rested when I come in and is hoverin' around his coat-pocket. I wonder if he's got a gun there and figure just how I'm goin' to fool him if he starts to pull it, by shuttin' off the light and droppin' to the floor.

My gun is in the scabbard on my right hip and if I reach for it he'll have a flash and a half the best of me on the draw, supposin' there is a gun in that pocket. But he keeps on talkin'—stallin' I figure.

"Well, I can't come tonight—I'm busy—too busy to waste any more time."

Here his hand dives into the pocket, his arm goes rigid and he swings just a little to the left.

Tick!

That minute I release the button on the light, the room goes dark and I drop sideways to the floor. And when I hit the carpet I hit it crawlin', for the door is still open and the hall-lights light up the openin' fine. So the best place for me is elsewhere. Which my hunch is just right, for as I disappear into the darkness his gun cracks twice, *bang! bang!* and the flash shows just the height of his pocket.

And now I've got his number, because if Jimmy Howe is Sam Casper, he's got to be Casper's pocket-shot pal that croaked Mary Corrigan's dad. Oh, no I don't think this —it just comes to me as I'm doin' my noiseless crawl away from that lit-up door—what thinkin' I'm doin' is about his next shot and where it's goin' to stop. I'm ponderin' that real anxiously.

Then my hand gropin' ahead hits a chair-leg, and the chair scrapes the baseboard, and all doubts about that next shot are settled, for instantly *bang! bang!* goes that gun again and my uniform cap is flirted off my head as if lightnin' struck it. The flashes this time are not a foot above the floor, showin' the professor is flattened out same as me. Which it's now up to me to sidestep the next shot.

Why don't I take a shot myself? Well, in the first place he's locatin' me so accurate just by guess that I don't feel like volunteerin' any help—like the flash of a pistol; and in the second place, all I got to do is sit tight for a minute and the report of his gun will bring a mob to the door and he'll have to lay down. 'Course, if he tries to make it out of the door he's my meat, I'll gun him sure; but my best bet is watchful waitin'.

So, as I said, it's up to me to outguess him for the next shot. The chair gives me the hint. He's shootin' just above the floor which suggests that the safe spot is up in the air. So, careful—careful—but none too slow, I climb that chair.

When I'm at last standin' on the seat, I notice that footsteps—a swarm of 'em—are hurryin' toward us down the hall, and there's a lot of excited talkin'. I notice this, but I'm thinkin' about that next shot.

It strikes me that it would be nice work to give the professor a tip—a bum tip. So, reachin' into my pocket, I get my bunch of keys and, leanin' as far to the side as I can, I am about to drop them so the professor can shoot at the noise when a voice from just outside the door checks me. It's Wickwire's voice—

"Fog, oh, Fog! Are you hurt, man?"

Gee! It sounds tearful and anxious. But d'ye think I call the glad tidin's that I am all right. I do not—I go on with my key-droppin'.

Jingle—*bang! bang!*

The professor has fell for my stall like a sucker.

Feelin' much better, I'm just about to sit on the chair-back when Wickwire leaps into the door. And say, he sure looked heroic—like the main guy in the third act of the mellerdrama. Bareheaded, shoulders throwed back and a 'ha-villain-I-have-ye-now' look on his face, he stops squarely in the door so we can see him good, for just one-tenth of a second—and then he dives into the darkness toward where the last shot flashed.

There comes a little sound of scufflin' feet —but not near as much as I expected—and then silence.

And now I don't know exactly what to do, unless it's just go on waitin'. But in my eagerness to know what's comin' off over there I lean just a little too far forward. The chair squeaks.

Bang! goes a single shot near the floor; zizz—zip, a bullet goes under me, and I freeze right up into a statue of watchful waitin' again. And there I sit quiet through a quarter of a minute of stillness, through a half-minute of scufflin' over there in the dark, through Wickwire's final breathless call of "Bring a light somebody—I've got him," and through the time it takes my friend Jimmy, the clerk to strike a match and get his nerve up and finally tiptoe in and turn on the light.

The room is full of smoke, naturally, but as Jimmy steps back after lightin' up, I notice first that the table, where the swag was piled when I come in, is between me and the place where the last sound of scufflin' come from. Also that it has been swept clean.

Then I notice Wickwire with the third-act look come into view above it and get slowly on his feet. Then I see he's got a tight grip on somethin'; and finally the professor, his hands hangin' helpless at his side, is hauled to his feet. There's a hole burned in his pocket by the first shot, the edges of which are still smokin', and he promptly gets busy puttin' it out. Meanwhile Wickwire is rubberin' around for me and finally spots me on my perch.

"Why, hello, Fog; are you hurt? What the devil are you doin' up there?"

"There's too many bullets flyin' just above the floor," says I, "so I climbs up here and roosts for purely sanitary reasons."

"Well, you can come down now," he says extra loud so that all the crowd, which was jammin' the hall and overflowin' into the room, could hear and admire. "I guarantee that he's through shootin' for the present."

I climb down and go round the table to them. And there ain't a sign of the loot I saw anywhere about the table, nor yet in the bag marked J. H. which has been kicked over by the wall where it lies, still open and still empty. That settled, I start friskin' the professor while the crowd and Wickwire grin at what they figure to be my recovery from nervous collapse.

The only thing of interest I find on the professor is one sawed-off pistol with an empty shell in each of its six chambers. Wickwire watches me lay it on the table with a scornful grin.

"Guess it's hoss and hoss between us on this case now," he says. "This guy had me fooled and you showed him up; then he had you treed and I let you down. Call it square—what?"

"Sure thing," says I; "guess I'll go call the wagon."

"Aw, never mind the wagon. I believe I'll just walk him down to headquarters. It's only three blocks, but I guess he won't walk that far again soon."

"But you are takin' an unnecessary chance," I argue when he cuts in:

"Aw, can it. I took him, didn't I? Well, he ain't as dangerous now as he was when I took him. You gather up his junk and come on after us. Or if you're scared of that, call the wagon and ride down with it. Here you—" to the professor—"hold your hand."

He flashes a pair of bracelets, locks one loop on the professor's wrist and one on his own, and, without payin' me any more mind, starts for the door, the crowd backin' into the hall ahead of him. He's half-way to the door when I get to him, and this time when I speak to him I've got the muzzle of my gun jammed against the back of his neck.

* * *

"WICKWIRE," says I, "put up your hands quick or I'll kill you, so help me."

I guess he thought I meant what I said, which I sure did, for he raised 'em so sudden and straight he just about dislocated the professor's arm—the one with the bracelet on.

The gang in the doorway went into a complicated fit, but I paid 'em no mind whatever.

"Jimmy," says I to my friend, "take off his gun."

Jimmy, wide-eyed and wonderin', did as he was told.

"Examine it," says I.

"One empty shell in it," says he.

"Smell the barrel," says I.

"Why, great Scott, it's been fired in the last few minutes!" says he.

"Say, what're you tryin' to get through you?" Wickwire finds his voice again and whirls facin' me, but with his hands still up for, though I've moved the gun off his neck, I've never stopped watchin' him along the barrel. "What d'ye mean, anyhow, you low-lived sneak? I'm your superior officer and I've just saved your life and——"

"And now you'll save your own by markin' time like a pretty boy," I cut in. "Right now I'll tell you no more than this: I'm holdin' you up for shootin' at me in the dark a minute ago. The rest of the charge against you I'll tell the chief when he arrives. Jimmy," says I to my friend, "have somebody get the chief over the phone and tell him I say come here as quick as he can. And then shut that door on the gang."

Which Jimmy did except that one quiet-lookin', quiet-dressed man quietly stepped in ahead of the door and calmly leaned against it when it was closed.

"Manager of the house," Jimmy explained.

All this time Wickwire was talkin' fast and excited and profane, but I was through with him for the present and so wasn't botherin' to listen. Now I says to him—

"You can put your hands down, now, and sit on the bed."

Which he, still fumin' and ragin' at me, did. But he gets no further attention from me, me bein' busy just then with the professor who is sittin' beside him on the bed.

"Professor," says I, "I'm not particularly anxious to include attempted murder with the other charges I got to make against you. So if you are willin' to shed a little light on a matter I am interested in on the side——"

"Aw, forget it. If you got anything on me — which you ain't — shoot her where she'll make the biggest splash. Far as that attempted murder stuff is concerned, I cracked down on you in self-defense, that's all. You come smashin' into my room with some wild talk and haul out a gun, and when I naturally reach for mine you blaze away at me. And what d'ye think I do when a mutt guns at me—sit still and smile?

"Oh," says I, "that's your alibi, is it. All right."

I reach over and get Wickwire's gun, bring its muzzle to bear on them and pass mine to Jimmy.

"Now, Jimmy," says I, "give that the once over, and invite your boss to have a look."

"Loaded all round," he says.

"How's the barrel?"

"Clean—no smell," he says.

"Frisk me for another gun, then," I grin.

"Nothin' doin'," he says, after goin' through me.

"There goes your alibi professor," I suggest.

"Sure does—and good fast work too," he says almost smilin'. "What you want to know?"

"Nothin' to hurt you or your pal Casper."

I was beginnin' again when his jaw sagged and he went a sickly gray.

"What—what?"

And even Wickwire, who'd been all along tryin' to make me hear what he was sayin' suddenly wriggled and went silent.

"Oh, that part is old stuff now: Jimmy Howe is Sam Casper and you are his pal—I can't call you by any name but Ham—who croaked old man Corrigan in Cincinnati five or six years ago. You see I got your number there, all right. Got it from the girl you had me pinch this mornin'. Also, I'm pretty wise to your and Casper's team-work—how he keeps the hicks lookin' straight up at him while you strip 'em clean.

"That bag over there with J. H. on it suggests that Casper is the treasurer for the team. No? But that makes no difference. What I'm gettin' at is this: I noticed when I first come in that among the things on the table there was the pearl stick-pin that you said Mary Corrigan touched you for this mornin', when you had me take her to the station. Well, she's sittin' in the hoose-gow at this minute, breakin' her heart over losin' her fellow and a reputation for bein' clean and on the level that she's been five years makin'.

"Now I'm for Mary strong as horseradish, and the story of how you emptied your gun at me in the dark will never be told in court, if you come across with the right dope so we can throw the girl and her beau loose in time to catch their train and get home by midnight. Are you on?"

"What pin was you alludin' to?" he grinned up at me. "I didn't have no pin on the table, nor nothin' else for that matter, when you come in."

But I wasn't set back much. And was just goin' to dig him out again when the chief arrived and took charge.

"Well?" he busted in, breathin' hard from hurryin' up-stairs. And then he noticed the bracelets on Wickwire and changed it to: "What the ——!" And Wickwire spoke up with such promptness and such a rush of information that I waited for my turn.

But Wickwire wasn't explainin' much except me, and so the chief finally shut him up and turned to me.

"What's the matter here? What are the men in handcuffs for? What is the meanin' of the gun in your hand and all this powder-smoke?"

Then, fast as I could, with Wickwire interruptin' every minute, I told him: about Mary's tale; about the professor and the queer way he watched the air-flight; about

Wickwire's muddyin' the water; about the robberies in the crowd; about identifyin' the air-man and then his pal; about Wickwire's attempt to bluff me; about my tellin' him I was goin' to pinch the professor anyhow and then givin' him time to get to my man ahead of me; about my dash into the room; the bombardment in the dark; Wickwire's grand-stand rescue; and finally my callin' a halt on everything with my gun.

"Yeh. I got your statement of the case," the boss growled, when I stopped, "and I got the sense of some of it; the rest is too much for me. For instance, you hint that Wickwire was tryin' to cover these dips. Where d' you get the notion."

"He threatened to bring charges against me if I didn't let this guy here alone, and that give me the idea. So then I told him I was goin' to pinch the guy anyhow and turn him over to you—only I spoke of pinchin' him in the mornin'. Right away he hotfoots here, and when I arrive the guy is packin' up to leave tonight. Looks like somebody had tipped him within fifteen minutes, don't it?"

"Hm-hum. What makes you think Wickwire fired that last shot in the dark?"

"There'd been six shots fired when he dived in. The professor there didn't have but one gun, but after Wickwire took a hand, a seventh shot went under me."

"Well, but he arrested his man, didn't he? That don't look like team-work."

"It don't? Why, what other chance was there for this guy to get away? Listen here. I caught the guy with the goods and he sees he's up against it proper, so he takes a pocket-shot at me that misses just by the mercy of the devil and the fact that my flash-light has got his eyes on the bum. Then he's got to put me off and do it quick because if he makes a break for the hall I can get him in the doorway, and if he's long about gettin' me there'll be a gang in the hall to head him off.

"So he's blazin' away at every sound when here comes Wickwire, who'd just left here, as Jimmy there will tell you, and who probably saw me hikin' in and made it back to see that I don't get to headquarters with my man. Locatin' the professor by his guncrack, he pulls his great rushin'-to-the-rescue act and tries his hand at puttin' me off. And then he sees that the safest way is to make the arrest himself, start walkin' toward headquarters with his man and let him get away. That's safe and looks certain.

"So he puts the professor wise, scuffles around on the floor a bit and then announces he's got him and calls for a light. It's due to read pretty in the papers. And there bein' no other way, I stopped it with my gun."

"Might be so—might—probably is so." The chief scratched his head. "But—but——"

"Might be so!" I cut in, my patience worn to a frazzle. "Well, then, what about this? When I come in that door there was a pile of stuff on the table, mostly purses, money and jewelry. I saw it, see; it was there when I shut off the light. When Jimmy turned the light on it was empty like it is now. Now, then where is it? I'll tell you and if I miss my guess I'm goin' to hand you my star before we leave this room. Wickwire's got it. He figured to slip the old guy some of the money, maybe, when he let him escape but the rest of it was goin' to stay where nobody'd ever look for it—in Wickwire's hands. Now, if the stuff ain't on him right now, prove it and I begin unpinnin'."

"Sure I got the stuff," blustered Wickwire. "It's to go in evidence as soon as the owners identify it. There's nothin'——"

"Oh, ain't there?" says I. "Well, even supposin' you'd find time to collect evidence while you was strugglin' with a desperate criminal, how did you know, in the dark just where to put your hand on the evidence?"

That got him—left him speechless with his lovely mouth open.

"—— fool," murmured the professor in his ear, and then turned to me. "Old Roughneck, you are there with bells. What you've got on this wise guy will probably hold him for a good long time, and I ain't sure but what I'll take a plea myself before I'll have you go on the stand against me. Anyhow, your proposition about the assault listens good and you're on.

"The fair dame that you say is breakin' her heart in jail has handed you somethin'. Why, man, that's Red Dick Corrigan's daughter and one of the slickest dips that ever probed a pocket. She tried to kill Casper in Cincinnati five years ago; snapped a pistol at him point blank and Sam's nerves ain't got over it yet. And Sam was stuck on her at the time, too, though I don't think she was ever able to see him.

"It was that same night I had to croak her old man. Sam was in on the killin' too, so you can figure whether he is anxious to renew his acquaintance with the jane. Me she didn't know at all, but I knowed her, for I was one of the dicks that mugged her the only time she was ever pinched.

"So when she breezed up this mornin', while I was jollyin' you, I knowed her in a wink, and seein' nothin' but trouble ahead if once she got her lamps on Casper, I framed up quick to put her away anyhow till we was out of town.

"The rest was quick and easy, only my bonehead friend here balled us up. I put him wise to the frame-up as soon as we got to headquarters, but much good it did. Beginnin' right then, he never missed a chance to pull the wrong play plumb up until he locked this cuff on me and turned his back to you. He's the limit, he is. Why, he's the guy that warned me to get in all my work on your beat, because you was pure bonehead—honest he did."

A minute or two afterward we started for headquarters. The crowd was still in the hall, and as they fell back from the door some one said:

"Mister Howe, the aviator, was here a few minutes ago. He was pretty excited when he heard the police was raidin' so close to his quarters and went straight to the office to pay up and move."

The professor grinned at me over his shoulder.

"Missed a bet there, didn't you, Old-Timer. Casper's beat it."

"That's quite all right," I grinned back as I locked the door. "I didn't forget him. There is not a train leavin' town for two hours yet, so, unless he walks out, he's our meat."

AN AFRICAN BREWERY

by MAJOR W. ROBERT FORAN

THE method of making beer among the Akikuyu is as follows: The trunk of a large tree, some ten to twenty feet long and eighteen inches in diameter, is roughly squared on three sides and bedded firmly in the ground. The upper surface is then made flat, with a strong edge three inches deep and wide, which runs all the way round the trough. On this surface they make cup-shaped cavities eighteen inches apart to form mortars. The pestles employed are about six feet long. The sugar-cane is stripped of its hard surface. The white cane is then cut into lengths and thrown into the troughs. The women range themselves on each side alternately, and with songs they crush it on the mortars with the pestles.

The men later wring the juice out of the pulp into calabash gourds. They then throw in some dried pods of the alofa tree to make fermentation. It takes eighteen hours more before the juice is ready to drink.

The Chase of the Four Fools

A Three-Part Story

by

Patrick and Terence Casey

Authors of "The Story of William Hyde."

IN THE steaming jungles of the Borneo we four were orchid hunting. *Fitzhamon* was an Irish aristocrat; *Koenraad de Jong*, a Dutch orchid-chaser; I, *Colum Kildare*, a ne'er-do-well from San Francisco; and our boss-boy, *Harry Christmas*, a big liver-hued negro, a deserter from the U. S. Cavalry.

De Jong had an orchid-hunting commission and was our captain. But he loathed the business and we learned soon his real desire was to enter the Jallan Batoe, an extinct volcano, and steal from the primitive golden-skinned people who live there, their Green, Green God, a life-sized parrot, carved from solid emerald. Six years before I had heard the story of this Borneo race and their Green, Green God from *William Hyde*, a giant of a man with a blood-red beard, whom I found in Honolulu, a green parrot straddling his shoulder, working a shell-and-pea game that some day he might get money to return to the Jallan Batoe, where he swore he had once been.

And *Hyde* had told me of a golden-skinned Princess—she who had become his wife—and of *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, the Priestess whose love for him had poisoned to hate when he chose another for his bride. Then the Priestess had convinced the people that *Hyde* meant to steal their Green, Green God. And there followed an uprising against *Hyde* and his Princess.

The red-bearded giant had escaped from the Jallan Batoe with only his life. Every couple of years he had tried to open up a tunnel into the Jallan Batoe, but the only entrance had been choked by a land-slide.

All this I remembered there in the jungle when suddenly upon our ears came the same rigmarole I had heard *Hyde* use while banking his shell game. *De Jong*, drunk, recognized it too and his mad desire to follow the mysterious voice led to a pitched battle with *Fitz* and *I* against *De Jong* and *Christmas*. Their game was to rid themselves of us forever, and they pitched me overboard and went on up the river in the *barito* in which we traveled.

I gained the shore and stumbled through the bush to a clearing, where I suddenly came upon a Dyak chief whom I knew to be a head-hunter. I evaded him and went on.

Jungle madness came upon me, and in it I saw about me troops of Tartar horsemen from Asia, the remnant of that great expedition of Genghis Khan which had invaded Borneo, suffered defeat and, cut off from the coast, sought refuge in the Jallan Batoe. It was from them that the golden-skinned race living there had descended.

Then my senses returned. I had almost walked into a band of head-hunters, toasting three human heads over a slow fire. They chanted about a Green, Green God, a Golden Woman, and a field of singing Sacred Stones. They implored their God to take away this Golden Woman who, it seemed, had come into their land.

Then out of the jungle stepped the golden woman herself and the savages fled. I knew in an instant she was *Lip-Plak-Tengga*, the Priestess.

She turned and disappeared. I followed her.

In a tiny glade I found not the Priestess but a very young girl, her face upturned, coaxing in English a great green parrot to come down out of a tree—the parrot Mogul I had seen on *Hyde's* shoulder in Honolulu. At once I guessed the truth. The girl had *William Hyde's* red hair; she was his daughter. It was now eighteen years since he first had entered the Jallan Batoe and wooed and won as his bride the Marshal Queen of the Poonan, *Golden Feather of Flame.*

I was right. The maid told me how her father had at last returned to the Jallan Batoe, bringing the parrot with him—returned to his wife, who had been made a slave.

The Poonan feared the parrot Mogul, believing it a god, and while it lived with *Hyde* and his family in their hut, they were safe. Meanwhile the girl's father had planned to regain his old position of Marshal King. But there had come a night when it rained and roared without, and Mogul had disappeared.

Lip-Plak-Tengga, who had caused the girl's mother to be made a slave and who feared her father, had learned of the parrot's disappearance. Taking advantage of this, she had ordered *Hyde* brought to the stone temple, or *Dobo.* And when he returned to his daughter he was a man who crawled. He had been hamstrung, the cords under his knees severed.

The blow had killed the girl's mother. But before the Priestess could incite the Poonan to further deviltry, Mogul had returned.

Then the girl told me of seeing my comrades heading toward the Jallan Batoe and she explained why she had broken the Poonan law that no one should leave the Jallan Batoe.

It seemed Mogul had again disappeared. This time *Lip-Plak-Tengga* was also missing. The Priestess had kidnaped the bird and the girl had followed and found it.

Hyde's daughter turned to me with pitiable entreaty:

"Already *Lip-Plak-Tengga* may have returned," she breathed. "She will stir up again in the Poonan their slumbering hatred for my fathaire. And this time they will kill him.

"Come, come. For the love of that God about whom my fathaire taught me, let us hasten. Let us get Mogul back to my fathaire, and all may yet be well."

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERY OF THE DINGLE

I TOOK the lead then. The girl followed, holding to my hand, her little pantalooned legs lifting and pounding with steadiness, with persistency, with purpose. Her face was serious, tragic with purpose. We were bound upon a great errand that allowed of no halt, that necessitated speed, the quick or slow consummation of which might mean the life or death of William Hyde.

We leaped over fallen tree-trunks which lay athwart the paths, we scurried beneath lianas which hung perilously low, we broke through tangles of *cogon* grass, surged through wet welters of fern—sped on and on, up that jungle, through lush and creepers and all manner of green, rich green vegetation.

Running thus, at the top of our legs, we made a deal of noise. But the jungle was vibrant with louder noises. It crooned with the song of a million insects; a dull, lazy and hot song, like the sound of a sawmill far off, or the sound of meat frying eternally.

The man appeared below us with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box. We had been hugging the side of a hill that gave down into a tiny hollow, a kind of leafy dingle. We had been looking neither to the right nor to the left. Well, coming around the huge bole of a *baru* tree, we saw now, not a stone's throw below, the negro boss-boy, Harry Christmas.

There, in that little dingle, he was squatted upon his liver-colored heels. His chest was bare, sleek and satiny. His battered service hat, a last remnant of his days in the United States cavalry, was shoved back on his woolly head, his head bent forward, and his profile visible to us in bold relief—a lean sharp profile, extraordinary in a negro, with full red lips that were yet not thick, and a high, thin, almost Semitic nose.

Back I got behind that huge bole of tree, shoving the frightened girl with the action, also into its concealment. Christmas had not seen us; he had not even heard us coming on. He was intent, just then, on some business that was going forward in the trampled lush between his kneepans. What it was, I could not tell.

The *cogon* grass of the little dingle, the elk-horn and polypody ferns, trailing aristolochias, convolvulus and other creepers, while they were trampled down to an extent, had still, withal, reared about his kneepans tiny hillocks and waves of concealing lush; and I could only tell, for a surety, that he was bent over his knees, peering down, and talking as to some sentient thing in a very low voice, a beautiful voice, deep-chested and full despite the softness of its pitch, and rich and pleasing to the ear with the rolling notes of the African:

"Looky heah, yo' got to stop dat! Three times Ah done lay yo' daown, an' three times yo' done up an' refuse me. Dat's no fairish way foh fairish bones to act. Come on naow. Come on naow; give me dat Big Dick!"

And he reached down, picked up something from the trampled lush, straightened himself suddenly from the belt up, and shook that something within the hollow of his big, black, flexed right hand. There was a muffled rattle like the beating in the closed hollow of the hand of a wooden clapper or a castanet.

The while he spoke, all that while I had had foreshadowing of what he was about. Goodness knows, his formula of talk was familiar enough to me by then to let me know precisely what he was about; yet the circumstances were such that they did not permit of those glimmerings of foreknowledge becoming anything but the faintest. Those circumstances—there in a secluded little dingle of that Adam-old jungle—made the thing too absurd, too uncouth, altogether too unbelievable.

But now, as he picked up that something from the lush and I got a glimpse of it, or rather them, in the liver-hued palm of his hand, and then heard those yellowish-ivory, black-spotted cubes rattle and rattle, as they danced about and smote together within the great closed hollow of his hand—then I just had to believe. The negro was playing craps!

Often before had he played a lone game of craps. He used to rattle the dice of evenings when he had tired of watching the Lon Wai boys go through their antics. I had not known until he had come out flat-footed that he was trying, all the time, to entice De Jong into playing a game in order that he might win some of the Dutchman's orchids. But I remembered well his formula of talk and laughter.

And I noted now that, for all he had gained his point, there was in his voice and laughter no spontaneity nor enthusiasm; in the deft movements of his big right hand, only that mechanical facility which comes of native dexterity and long, deep-ingrained habit.

He never snapped back his woolly head the better and more freely to laugh. He kept his head bent, his eyes lowered. He rolled the dice continually, always with the one hand, the big black right hand, and always mechanically. And he never forgot to talk, to laugh, and to do all that constrainedly, with little of enthusiasm when he gained his point, with nothing of bitterness when he lost, with only and ever a conscious softness of tone.

In truth, the mechanicalness of his actions was such and such, too, was the restraint of his tones, that it was as if he were conscious of our presence there above him and thus, by fiddling with the dice, mouthing inconsequences, was fretting away our impatience. It was as if he were beguiling the time in that manner until we should weary of watching and waiting and go on to the Jallan Batoe and the camp between, wholly empty of the knowledge of his real purpose.

Anyhow, I was thinking thus when I heard, once again, that muffled rattle of the dice dancing within the closed hollow of his big right hand. It was like the warning signal of a rattlesnake. And it struck me, then, that it might well be a signal—the one thing unmeaning enough to those not in-the-know, yet audible enough to be heard by any one awaiting, within a short distance, that particular sound.

I LOOKED at the underwood to the other side of the little dingle; an underwood that sprouted up from the black teeming earth and dripped down from the colossal trees in an unbroken wall of green, flecked here and there with haphazard daubs of bright colors; and it seemed to me that now, if slightly, all that lush waved toward me, and now, ever so slightly, bent back, as if for all the truth there were some kind of movement going on in the denseness behind.

Whether that movement was the movement caused by animals scampering about, or the movement caused by men coming on, I could not judge. But of one thing I was certain. While Harry Christmas was still rattling and rolling out the dice, he had changed radically his formula of talk.

"Evenin', neighbors," he was saying now; "evenin' to yo'. Dat's two aces Ah rolled den; li'l ole box-cars; an' dose box-cars pays yo'. Ole Harry Christmas, he hearn yo' comin' when yo'-all was back in de bresh a spell. He cayn listen right pert, ole Harry. Sho', he cayn hear yo' breathin' naow, an' yo' comin' on pussy-footed as monkeys! 'Lowin' yo'll fetch de ole man a s'prise, yeah?"

And he laughed that low but deep-chested rippling laugh, what time, without once lifting his head, as if deeply engrossed, he continued to rattle and roll out the dice.

It was uncanny. I watched that wall of green the other side of the dingle, and I think I failed to breathe. Everything—the trembling girl beside me, the growths about—seemed to fail to breathe. The weird waving of the lush, now toward me, now away from me, was wholly lacking in sound, and save for the rattle of the dancing cubes, the low monotone of the negro's talk, the giant song of the insects, all was steamy stillness.

And then, of a sudden, without once lifting his head, without once stopping the play of the dice, Christmas broke out, in a low-pitched voice, into his favorite camp-meeting hymn:

Keep a-inchin' along, keep a-inchin' along;
    Jesus will come bime by.
Keep a-inchin' along lak' a pore inch worm;
    Jesus will come bime by.

The girl beside me shivered violently and tightened her grip on my hand.

"I am afraid," she said with a catching of breath, "afraid of this dark man. I do not know what he is about; but it is something bad, bad! And I am more afraid that, if we tarry longer, my fathaire may be killed and I not be near to save him. Let us go!"

She made to step out from behind the bole of the tree. I pulled her back. Almost roughly I pulled her back.

"Wait," was all I said; but it proved enough.

For she saw, then, and of a sudden, what it was I saw. And dumfounded, horribly amazed, we both stared below us like creatures in a spell.

Below us, breaking out of that wall of waving green and stepping down into the trampled lush of the dingle, came now, all at once, two *Orang Benua*. One was *jawat*-girted, draped over the chest by a sacred *pehang* skin, furtive of eye, lacking of brows and lashes, and bedizened of ears and person with many barbarous ornaments. He carried at his waist, in a sheath, a heavy curved *mandau*, and both sheath and sword were tasseled with human hair. He was that selfsame head-hunter chief who had passed me two days prior in the lush, and whom I had seen among all his men, in that natural theater, the night before. He was *Dau-Dau-Makai*, Eater of Brains, chief of the *Loeang Benua*.

The other man, weaponless and shorter than the chief, was unmistakable. Even though his long, black and shiny hair was no longer encircled by a wreath of blood-creeper, or his neck by folds of raw diamonds, he was that long of arm and generally ape-like in appearance, he was unmistakable. He was the *manang-mansau*, or witch-doctor of the *Loeang Benua*.

The pair of savages came closer to the negro, now stopping to consider their danger, now cautiously advancing a pace, and watching all the while the rolling dice, the rattling dice, the negro's big right hand, the negro's full-working red lips. In their small and close-set eyes showed the struggle that was being waged within them.

Within them was that great fear which the ferine animal has for anything that is not wild, that is not of its own kind or within its ken. Harry Christmas was palpably, even to them, not of their own kind; his black magic of the dice was beyond their ken. And yet that black magic—those rolling cubes, that quick hand, those working red lips, that loud yet muffled rattle and incessant singing—was creating within them a fascination, a great fascination, that was irresistible to their brute souls, that drew them near and nearer.

Peeping out, unable to move but urged to cough, I remained where I was, like a hare in a fright. We were, the girl and I, like two hares paralyzed by fright.

And the negro never looked up. The head-hunters drew close about him, huddled close as a gang of bats. He never looked up. Nor yet never did his big right hand halt, his full-working red lips quiet. They moved without termination, endlessly.

It was as if Harry Christmas feared to pause, in song or game, lest the spell should be loosed from the savages and they should betake themselves headlong, like a skulk of frightened foxes, back into the jungle. He never lifted his head. He rattled the dice, rolled out the dice. And he sang on in that rich melodious voice of his, pitched low:

We'll inch an' inch an' inch along;
Jesus will come bime by.
An' inch an' inch till we git home;
Jesus will come bime by.

CHAPTER XI

CROWDED MOMENTS

I FELT as if I should choke with pent-up breath and that itch to cough. I pressed the hollow at the base of my throat, just above the sternum, and swallowed hard. That relieved me from the itch to cough. And then, not a moment later, I became aware that Christmas had broken off, of a sudden, in singing his religious distich.

The negro's big right hand reached out, caught up the dice, clenched them tightly in his hand. Abruptly he looked up.

"*Ari ni nuan?*" he asked bluntly. "From whence are you?"

He looked full at the chief as he uttered that Dyak form of greeting. The chief straightened sharply. From bending down to watch closely the negro's black magic, both chief and witch-doctor straightened sharply and teetered on their naked legs as if in two minds whether to stay or run for it.

Harry Christmas gave them no time. He did not wait for them to answer. He said on.

He spoke in Dyak. He seemed to know both head-hunters uncommonly well. He called the witch-doctor, *Ipo-Ipo-Utan*, Poison of the Jungle. And there was in his talk much mention of *daus* and of *wook*. He was talking of hair and brains and human heads. He was making some offer to them of human heads.

Quickly, with something of intuition, I put two and two together. He was talking of heads that at present graced the shoulders of men, heads to be taken with honor. He was offering to these *Orang Benua*, I made no doubt, the heads of Fitz, De Jong, and all their Lon Wai bearers!

What he wanted the savages to do in return for his splendid offer, I could not determine. I only knew that here, in one of our own men, I had found treachery. And now, on the back of that, I got wind of more mischief.

Shattered the air violently, on a sudden, from somewhere ahead in the direction of the camp, a *crack!* like the sharp report of a pistol.

I jerked back from peeping around the bole of the tree. I thought, for the fraction of a second, that some one was shooting at me, that I was shot. I clung to that bole of tree. And we were then, the girl and I, as still as mice in a church, and as frightened.

The rattle of the dice, suddenly renewed, brought me out of my fright. Around the bole of tree, again I peeped.

The head-hunters stood close about the squatted negro, their small eyes fluttering, their right legs raised as if to run for it, and their heads cocked to the side in a posture of intent listening that was like the listening posture of a scared adjutant-bird.

The negro, meantime, was rolling out the dice, rattling the dice, rolling them out again, quickly, almost frantically, as if in a feverish attempt to draw back their attention.

"Lan', lan'!" he chortled. "Dere's li'l Phoebe. Li'l Phoebe allus means good luck foh ole Harry. Ah'll try hit out."

He said in Dyak:

"Wot yo' listenin' foh? Don't yo' know wot dat noise am? Dat's de cry ob de white-an'-brown hawk, de bird spirit ob de great god *Singalang Burong*. Dat's a good sign, *tuai rumah*. Dat bird, he's a-tryin' to tell yo' mah talk am fairish talk. Hain't dat right, *Ipo-Ipo-Utan?*"

The witch-doctor nodded, the fringe of whitened hair on his low forehead dancing with the act, up and down. Truly was Harry Christmas getting on to a wish with the head-hunters. He was not troubled by what was happening ahead in the camp; he had no inkling that we hovered so close to him; only was he concerned with the Dyak chief and witch-doctor.

Yet had the startling report of that pistol caused to bourgeon within the girl's breast, an immense perturbation. She was all of a-tremble with the desire to leave, to go on. And noting this, and put by that pistol-report into a kind of disquieted twitter myself, I made a motion now to her and crept on all fours up the side of the dingle.

With the parrot clinging to her shoulder, the one-stringed fiddle dragging from her hand along the ground, she followed, in the same posture, on hands and pantalooned knees.

We interposed thus, between Christmas and us, a number of trees and concealing bushes, and then, judging it safe, I got to my feet. The girl got afoot. And thereupon, on toward the camp and the Jallan Batoe beyond, the girl's hand once more in mine, we sped.

A second sharp report of a pistol sounded ahead. Sounded ahead, on the echoes of it, the voice of De Jong, saying:

"What you t'ink, now, *Orang Sungei?* You lead us to der Jallan Batoe und der Green, Green *Gott*, what?"

"*Deewa* is *baik;* our God is good!" came in Dyak in awestricken tones. "But the Green, Green *Deewa* of the *Poonan* is a terrible god. He will peck out our hearts through our backs, *tuan*. We can not go on farther."

I understood in a flash. De Jong was trying to force his Lon Wai boys to go with him into the Jallan Batoe. They felt they already had gone far enough; in fact, too far. An innumerable number of legends and superstitions were attached to the Jallan Batoe. Its crater was held to be the abode of a great evil deity, the Green, Green God. It was *puni* to them, a place tabooed. De Jong had tried words, kicks, and now, no doubt, had resorted to bullets.

"You von't go? Do you hear dot, Harry, *mein* friendt? Dey is rebellious like dot ignoramus, Fitz. You von't go, poys? You say dot? *Himmel*, I shows you!"

For the third time there came to our ears the short sharp crack of a pistol. The girl beside me trembled nervously. I took a firmer and reassuring grip on her hand.

"Come," I said. "Let's see what's up."

We emerged, after a little, into a small clearing on the side of a tall mountain. The sun, immediately overhead, flooded it with hot light. To one hand, heaped up on the slope like talus at the foot of a cliff, were many great timbers of iron wood. That was the old Dyak fort of the insurrectionary chief, Soro Patti, about which Hyde had told me. This was Hyde's clearing then, at the base of the mountain of the Jallan Batoe.

Now, backed up against those great timbers, standing in a single line like a squad of rookies, I saw the fourteen Lon Wai Dyaks of the crew. Fitz was nowhere to be seen. But De Jong was there, making down the line of Dyaks, in his right hand his death-dealing .44 revolver that had the big flourish to the butt, his other hand outreaching and touching, quite oddly, each of the Dyaks in turn.

Even as I looked, he came to the end of the line. His outreaching hand dropped like a weight, to his side.

"*Gott* in *himmel!*" he ejaculated, as if fearfully surprised. "Dere is fourteen, alvays der fourteen. I shoot, bud dey don't dies. Dey is deffel-deffels. Dey don't dies. Und emeralds don't dies."

He half turned his head over one shoulder.

"Harry, *mein* friendt," he said as if he were speaking to the negro, "I tells you sumdings: Emeralds is alvays green, alvays. Dey don't dies."

He swung full about and faced us. As we stood on the margin of that clearing we were in plain view. He looked directly at us, and he said:

"You, Harry, *mein* friendt—you make dese Dyaks show us der vay. Shoot dem down. Here, take *mein* gun."

He held the revolver out to us.

"Harry," he repeated, his voice rising and shaking as with some great anxiety, "where is you?"

He waited. There was no answer, there was little sound of any kind; there was only, about it all, something which fettered my tongue, my limbs, and caused my grip on the girl's hand to turn limp and cold. The Dyaks at De Jong's back were motionless and stoical as graven images. There seemed to be, about the whole scene, the cold grip of something appalling, something hideous, something repulsive.

De Jong shook his sun-toasted head.

"Harry, *mein Kamerad*," he muttered dolefully, "what you do—blay seek-und-hide with poor Koenraad de Jong?"

He looked about him then, quickly; and as he turned his head thus, now to one side, now to the other, and the sun no longer beat so glaringly upon his face, I noted that which I had not noted before. His wrinkled monkey-eyes were swelled, as a result of that fight he had had with Fitz on the *prau* three days before, into two soft blue-black pouches. There was no gleam of eyes. He could not see. He looked about him, and he could not see. He was blind.

There, as he stood in the hot sun, a shivering fit racked through him. He shivered, then, as a man shivers on the day following a spree, as a man shivers in the icy clutch of ague. And the big .44 fell from his hand. And he clapped both hands over his swelled discolored eyes.

"*Gott, Gott!*" he cried in a terrible voice. "He is gone, *mein Kamerad* is gone! He has left me alone—alone mit dese Dyaks! And I can't see, I can't see, I can't——"

He pitched forward upon the ground; his voice fainted away in the sweltering air; and he was very still, save only that his fingers dug into the soil and tore convulsively at the grass.

At that, all at once, the vise-grip of horror was shattered asunder. De Jong stood in an urgent need of me. I ran toward him.

The girl was immediately at my heels. Well, as we came full into the clearing, one of the motionless Lon Wai boys happened to catch sight of her. His stoic attitude dropped from him like a mask.

"The Golden Woman!" he shouted fearfully. Then, glimpsing upon her shoulder, as she ran, the swaying green form of the parrot Mogul, his voice wailed up into a horrid shriek: "The Green, Green God, the Green, Green God!" And he whirled round, leaped over the heaped-up timbers behind him, and dashed headlong into the jungle.

The others looked, at his horrid shriek, and with that one look, fled. The jungle swallowed them completely. But suddenly, as there slipped to our ears their shaken cries, "The Green, Green God, the Green, Green God!" the parrot, Mogul, as if startled from sleep, rolled open his red eyes, flapped his green wings rapidly, and then, lifting his head, said in clipping tones:

"And the God, the Green, Green God! And then some, bee-lieve me—*cluck, cluck!*"

DE JONG rolled over, so that the sun beat full upon his face and cruelly upon the blue-black pouches that concealed his eyes. He seemed to be straining his eyes. His lips moved. I bent over him.

"*Mein Gott!*" he was mumbling. "Id is der Vilhelm Hyde! Id is der Vilhelm Hyde und his Golden Vimmon, what dot young fool told us aboud down der Barito. Dey haf got away. Dey haf got avay mit der Green, Green *Gott*. Oh, *mein Gott, mein Gott!*" And he tossed about in a sort of delirium.

"Listen, Conrad," I said in an attempt to calm him. "It is not William Hyde. It is Kildare, that young fool, Colum Kildare. Don't you know me, Con——"

"Oh, Colum!" came unexpectedly in a shout from somewhere near at hand. "Help me out, Colum. I can't move; I'm bound hand and foot. Here, up here behind these *bilian* timbers. Every last one of those Lon Wai devils jumped on me. Even that crazy Dutchman came nearer hitting me than any one in that bunch. Oh, I'm a regular down pin, I tell you, Colum boy! Say, isn't that you' Colum?"

It was the voice of Fitz. I left the little Dutchman, who still was tossing and babbling, and made across the clearing, and up to the *bilian* balks of the old Dyak fort. Surely enough, there behind the timbers, I found Fitz bound hand and foot. His thin, clever face lighted, upon seeing me, with a joy unmistakable. As I cut the bonds with my clasp-knife I asked how it was he happened to be held captive.

"It's a wonder to me," I said, "that the boss-boy didn't make away with you."

"Well, it's not because he didn't try hard enough," Fitz returned with a grim smile. "Ever since we lost you, that time the negro kicked me in the head, he has been egging De Jong on to finish me. He tried to irritate me into another fight with De Jong, now by keeping up an aggravating flow of song, and again by helping out De Jong in his morbid litany about the immortality of emeralds. He wanted another fight so he could sneak another chance at me. Oh, he's an underhanded, liver-hearted——"

"I know," I said. "But what did you do?"

"Oh, I was canny. I had learned my lesson. I was wise enough to keep my mouth tight shut. I wanted no more fights with De Jong. And De Jong—well he wasn't seeking any whirls with me. He's a superstitious little peanut, De Jong. He thinks all kinds of misfortunes have come to him since we started out on this chase. There was that fight, and then his eyes swelled up from that fight so that now he can hardly see. And you know, he never could get it through his head how you had been lost from the *prau*. Christmas explained, often enough, how you had shot overside when the boat swerved, but he would persist that——"

Fitz had been stretching his limbs, smoothing his khaki trousers and shirt, and getting to his feet as he talked. Well, suddenly, as his head came above the *bilian* timbers, he broke off, grasped my arm, and exclaimed:

"Colum lad! That girl down there! What a beauty! And look—Mogul's on her shoulder, William Hyde's parrot! Who is she? A Golden Woman?"

He was staring with distended eyes down at the girl. I looked at the girl. And it struck me, with some force, what a pretty picture she made there, standing beside the twisted form of De Jong in her purple blouse and green pantaloons, the leashed parrot drowsing upon one shoulder, the single-stringed fiddle with attached rattan bow in one hand, and the golden devil-chasers dangling from that pert round cap and quivering in the sunlight upon her little forehead and rich hair that was as darkly red as ripening opium poppies.

"She is," I said, "William Hyde's daughter."

Thereupon, I gave him the gist of all that I knew about Butterfly of the Dark.

"Now that Mogul is outside the Jallan Batoe," I ended, "Hyde's life is in peril. The Poonan will discover Hyde no longer has the parrot; they will lose all fear of Hyde; and they will rise up against him. We are hastening, Butterfly of the Dark and I, into the Jallan Batoe. We hope to avert misfortune to Hyde by returning the parrot. In numbers is strength. Maybe she will want you to come along to help."

"Introduce me," said Fitz gaily, and he laughed. But he never finished that laugh. It was sucked down his throat.

For the fourth time, there sounded below us in the jungle, all at once, the report of a firearm, the *crang!* of a rifle; and something *zipped* between Fitz and I so closely that the wind of it fanned our faces!

We sprung apart. I cried—

"Who's that?"

Fitz looked at me, his gray eyes somber, his face pale and slick with sudden damp, his jaw biting out.

"Harry Christmas!" he said.

CHAPTER XII

HARRY CHRISTMAS IN A DUBIOUS LIGHT

EVEN as Fitz spoke, out of the jungle below came loping into the clearing the negro boss-boy, Harry Christmas. A Sharp's .50 rifle was slung in one hand. He came loping up the slope of the clearing toward us. As he clambered over the *bilian* balks, he asked between quick breaths—

"Did Ah kotch him?"

I was incensed at the man. The fact that he almost had shot us and now proffered not so much as an apology, provoked me to anger.

"Catch who?" I said. "What are you talking about? I'll tell you one thing. You almost scotched Fitz and I."

Fitz said never a word. He kept watching the negro. Once over the *bilian* balks, Christmas made on his spread legs up the slope. As he went to enter the jungle above, Fitz said—

"Christmas!"

The negro did not halt. For all that he must have heard, he did not halt.

"Christmas!" Fitz repeated, a metallic rasp creeping into his voice.

The negro swung round.

"Christmas," said Fitz for the third time, his eyes on the eyes of the negro; "you came mighty near shooting us just now, and you know it. I don't want it to happen again. You hear me? I don't want it to happen again." The tone of his voice was a threat.

Harry Christmas backed away. Though Fitz was unarmed; though already he was separated from us by a distance of some ten feet, he backed away. And his face became suddenly glossy with sweaty emotion.

"No, 'fense, Mistah Fitz," he cringed. "Law' knows, ole Harry Christmas didn't mean no 'fense. Yo' knows, Mistah Fitz, dat Ah wint out into de jungle to shoot some animule, so's to git fat foh de swellin's on Mistah De Young's eyes. But he done seen nuthin' in dat jungle, ole Harry didn't. But comin' back, he sees a *owoi*, a ole wild pig gallopin' to beat de band up on dis heah slope, right behind yo' heads. Harry Christmas shot den, afore he thought how clost yo-all was. But golly, suh, ole Harry didn't mean no 'fense, nohow."

Fitz never removed his eyes from the eyes of the negro. The whites were showing starkly in the negro's eyes.

"If you try that again, Christmas," Fitzhamon's lips cracked, "if you try that again, I'll kill you!"

Fitz was unarmed, yet he showed no

vestige of fear, only a vast contempt. He never turned round.

"Come on, Colum lad," he said almost gaily. "Allow me to meet Miss Butterfly of the Dark."

"Fitz," I said soberly, as I climbed after him down the *bilian* timbers, "I came upon that boss-boy, a while back, in the jungle. He did not know that I and the girl were there. He was playing craps, a solitary game of craps."

Fitz nodded his comprehension.

"As he always is doing," he corroborated. "You know how he tried to inveigle De Jong into a game of craps that time we were picking orchids? He wanted to win some of those orchids for himself. He knows he's no slouch at handling the dice. Well, since you disappeared, he's been trying to induce De Jong to play him for some share of the plunder both he and De Jong hope to get from the Jallan Batoe.

"But De Jong could not see it. He's wrapped up in the idea of securing the Green, Green God for his entire own. De Jong could not even see playing me for any part of the plunder, though the boss-boy tried hard enough to pit him against me in a game. He hoped, that negro, to cause one or both of us to get enraged over the result of such a game; he hoped that then we might start another fight, and thereby enable him to sneak over a blow that would do for me."

I nodded several times as Fitz spoke and made, several times, to interrupt. But Fitz kept on. Now, as he finished and I saw the negro in an even more dastardly light, I glanced back over my shoulder, I'll admit, quite nervously.

But the negro had disappeared. There was a great to-do going on above in the jungle; I could see some of the bushes and hanging creepers shaking; and I knew that the negro was beating the brush for that wild pig he was supposed to have shot.

"But Fitz," I finally was given a chance to say, "that game of craps was not all. You noticed that when he came back into this clearing, there was slung in his hand a rifle. When I saw him in the dingle, however, he had no rifle. He had concealed it somewhere——"

"But why? Why should he conceal his gun and risk going unarmed in this jungle?"

"He was expecting company," I said quietly, "and he did not want, by a show of weapons, to scare that expected company away. For while he was in the midst of that game of craps, up to him, from out of the jungle, stepped *Dau-Dau-Makai* and *Ipo-Ipo*——"

Fitz stopped and grasped my arm.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "What in the world are you talking about? Who's this *Dau-Dau* and *Ipo-Ipo?* Sounds like Dyak to me. Are they Dyaks?"

"They are head-hunters," I returned, "Eater of Brains, chief of the *Loeang Benua*, and Poison of the Jungle, his witch-doctor. And they met our friend Christmas in the jungle, a while back, as I said; and he called them by name; and he made some offer to them of human heads."

"The scoundrel!" ejaculated Fitz. "I'll wager he was offering them our heads!"

We were passing a stack of revolvers and rifles, at that moment, and Fitz bent down and, quite significantly, rummaged through that stack for the revolver that had been taken from him when he was made prisoner.

"So I thought," I assented. "But what did Christmas want them to do in return, in payment to him, for our heads? You know Christmas is not doing anything for nothing."

Fitz snapped erect. His retrieved .45 Colt's sparkled in his hand. His eyes sparkled in his head as with an inspiration.

"I've got it, Colum boy, I've got it! He's going to get rid of us—that's plain. But here's what I think—he's going to lead a party of his own into the Jallan Batoe. That will be his pay for betraying us to the head-hunters. It will be a party of these head-hunters!"

I scoffed the idea.

"Absurd," I said. "These head-hunters would no more care to put foot into the Jallan Batoe than you would care to put foot in hell. It is *puni* to them, a place of taboo. It is the abode of a great dread deity, the Green, Green God."

I broke off. We had drawn near the girl.

"This is a friend of mine, Butterfly of the Dark," I said, "the Honorable Sarsfield Pembroke Fitzhamon."

I gave Fitz, then, what I believed was his true and proper title and name. Fitz never had told me that name or the handle thereto; but Hyde had called him that upon recognizing him, years before, and somehow, in some cubby of my brain, the appellation had stuck.

But truly, I had deeper reasons for giving Fitz, in this introduction, his full title and name. So naive was Butterfly of the Dark and so wholesomely unspoiled and truthful that I felt, now, a need for truthfulness upon our part, a throwing aside of all duplicity. And added to that, I wanted to show Fitz, in some way, the great admiration I felt for him, an admiration that had been growing on me all these years that we had been buddies together.

Fitz, you remember, was a remittance man, disclaimed and disowned by his titled father. He looked oddly at me as I spoke. But gravely from the hips he bowed, like one to the manner born, as became indeed the son of an Irish baronet.

The girl acknowledged the bow with a winsome smile.

"Ooh, I am so pleese!" she exclaimed with charming simplicity and in that charmingly accented, lisping voice. "And will you come with us into the Jallan Batoe, as—as a friend of his?" She nodded toward me.

"Glad to," said Fitz. There was in his voice, I remarked, an enthusiasm and a tone of reverence that was both a surprise and a delight to me. "But how do we go in?" he asked. "When your father told us about the Jallan Batoe, six years ago——"

"Ooh!" interrupted the girl under the impulse of a pleased amazement. "Then you knew my fathaire, too?"

Fitz nodded. He said jovially:

"Yes, and I have reasons to remember him. They say no one has a more wholesome respect for a man than the one that has fought against him. I suppose that both your father and I feel that way about each other. When we last met, you know, we had quite a little set-to."

Fitz laughed gaily at the memory of the fight he had had with Hyde in the fo'c's'le of the tramp *Fairhaven*, six years before.

"But I was saying," he went on, "that your father had found it impossible to return to the Jallan Batoe on account of the fact that the tunnel, which led into the crater, had caved in during some storm. Have the Poonan re-opened that tunnel?"

"Yes, yes," she said. She went on to explain:

"The waters of the *Danau*, the Great Swamp of the Jallan Batoe, used to drain out through that tunnel. When the tunnel fell in, the water found a hard time in flowing off. Indeed, in the rainy seasons, the *Danau* would rise up, top its banks, and flood big stretches of the crater. The Poonan suffered these floods, so great was their fear that, should they reopen the tunnel, my fathaire would come back.

"But after twelve seasons of rain and floods and great misery, they at last took steps to clear the tunnel. They thought that my fathaire must be dead by this time. They gathered together nine-times-nine—ooh, ever so many slaves, my poor mothaire among the number, and all bearing rattan-woven *lebets* on their backs; and they filled those *lebets* with the earth that choked the tunnel; and so they reopened the way into the Jallan Batoe.

"But hardly had three moons come out in the sky to see the finished work, when one day my fathaire returned."

I left the girl and Fitz, thus engaged in conversation, and went over to where De Jong lay. He still was tossing about on the ground and maundering feebly.

"Get up, Conrad," I said. "I'm not William Hyde. William Hyde is in the Jallan Batoe; that was only his parrot you heard. I'm Colum, I tell you; Colum Kildare, the young fool who helped you to pluck orchids and whom you lost on the Barito. And this girl with me is only William Hyde's daughter——"

His voice rose then, and he rolled about on his stomach like a stubborn child.

"*Nein, nein,*" he babbled. "Colum, dot poy is dead. He died on der Barito. Und you is der Vilhelm Hyde vot is running avay mit der Golden Vimmon, mit der Green, Green *Gott.* Gif dot to me. Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies——"

Fitz looked over at me and tapped his forehead significantly. Excusing himself to the girl, he drew near. His gray eyes were sparkling, and he said enthusiastically and quite at a tangent:

"What a voice! What a manner! What entrancing simplicity!"

"Who?" I asked, though truth to tell I knew he could mean but one person.

"Why that girl," he began as if painfully surprised that I should not know, "Butterfly of the Dark."

A hurly of noise from up the jungled slope engaged, at that moment, our attention. The unseen negro was beating the bush with the butt of his gun and shouting lustily.

The pig must have been wounded all this time; yet, all this time, instinctively he had remained quiet in an attempt to hide his place of concealment and, if possible, to get away. Just now he was squealing like a rat in a trap.

The squeals broke off abruptly, as if his throat had been slit; the shouts of the negro subsided; and, for a time, all was still.

WE WATCHED. After a time again, the negro appeared, the rifle slung in one hand and, in the other, a chunk of fat. He had cut up the pig in that time of quiet, and had cut out this chunk of fat. Now, coming down to De Jong, he proceeded to poultice the discolored pouches over the Dutchman's eyes with slabs sliced off from that chunk of fat.

Fitz was once more talking to the girl. I was alone with the negro, save for De Jong. And I noted, of a sudden, that the negro as he busied himself over De Jong, kept gazing this way and that about the clearing and the jungle which palisaded it on every hand.

"What are you looking for?" I asked sharply. "The Dyaks?"

He looked up quickly, as if startled. His jaw went slack, and his eyes rolled up to show the whites.

"Wot Dyaks, boss?" he said, hedging.

As a cat fools with a mouse, so I fooled, then, with Harry Christmas. I waited, eying him covertly. There was, about the negro's actions, something that was very like the actions of a criminal who fears that his crime has been discovered. I had no doubt but that Christmas thought, in his guilt, that I was referring to the Dyaks he had met in the jungle, the head-hunter chief and witch-doctor. There was no reason, I know, why he should have such a thought; he was not aware that I had seen him in the jungle; but a guilty mind needs, as the saying has it, no accuser.

I ended his misery.

"What Dyaks?" I repeated. "Why our Dyaks, of course. Who else could I mean but the Lon Wai boys?"

His mouth closed sharply, and his eyes gleamed as with the brilliance of overjoyed understanding, inexpressible relief.

"Lawdy, suh!" he burst out. "Dat's jes' wot ole Harry done was t'inkin' to hisself. Whar am all dose ornery Lon Wai boys?"

The negro was too pleased at getting off so easily. Really, I began to think, quite suddenly, that he might indeed have been looking around for some expected appearance of those head-hunters. But all I said was—

"Oh, the Lon Wai boys got frightened and took to the jungles."

Christmas finished, in a jiffy, poulticing the eyes of the Dutchman. He retrieved for De Jong his Chinese sun-hat which was made of straw and shaped like an inverted bowl. Pressing the hat down over De Jong's head, the negro lifted the little Dutchman bodily to his feet by a hold on his collar.

He left De Jong standing helplessly to one side. He picked up, from that stack of arms, and proceeded to buckle about his waist, a belt and holster containing a ten-shot automatic. Already he was armed with the Sharp's rifle. Well, now, I did not know whether this addition to his armament was made through fear of Fitz or through some other fear. I could only shrug my shoulders and wait. I drew away from the negro and the helpless Dutchman, and approached Fitz and the red-haired girl.

"Let us go on," she was saying hastily, as if suffering from a renewal of her fears, her words tripping in odd accent over one another. "Ooh, let us lose no more time here, but make into the Jallan Batoe before it is too late. My fathaire needs me—me and the parrot. We must hurry, hurry!"

Fitz and I nodded a ready assent. She turned, thereat, and started up the slope toward where a sparser mass of foliage in the surrounding green wall showed a faint opening through the jungle.

Fitz followed. I trod in his steps. And behind us, as at a wordless command, came Harry Christmas, his legs bowed, the rifle slung in one hand. Bringing up the rear, his eyes covered by huge bandages, the broad brim of his Chinese sunhat flapping up and down as if it were made of elastic rubber, and his two hands outreaching, slipping on the sweaty skin of the negro's naked back and clutching at the belt about the negro's waist, stumbled the Dutchman, Koenraad de Jong, ever muttering to himself.

Thus, led by a girl in pantaloons, a green parrot clinging to her shoulder, a one-stringed fiddle in her hand, and with a blind man closing up the rear, we filed, in queer procession, out of the clearing on the last leg of our try for the Jallan Batoe.

CHAPTER XIII

HARRY CHRISTMAS LOOKS BACK

IT WAS coming noon, as we filed out of that little sloping clearing on the side of the Jallan Batoe, and I welcomed, accordingly, the cool shade of the jungle. We went through that opening in the banking wall of green and, hardly a step beyond, dipped down into a runway that was deep as a gully.

Pursuing this, we debouched, after a time, upon a shallow stream which was trilling its way merrily down the slope of the mountain toward the Loeang. It was that very stream which Hyde, you remember, had followed against the current up into the Jallan Batoe.

The girl sat down on one bank of the stream and without any affected modesty, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to do, slipped off from her feet the woven grass sandals. She turned up the bottoms of her green pantaloons to her milk-white knees.

She stood up, the water dimpling in tiny circles and ringlets about her legs, her hand crowded with the sandals and the one-stringed fiddle.

"Let me carry the fiddle for you," Fitz offered.

She gave it to him with a little smile. She seemed to have no knowledge of the attraction of sex. Come of the elasticity of youth, now that we were headed again for the Jallan Batoe, she seemed to lose sight of the enormity of our object in the trivial aspects of the present. She started on upstream, wading like a boy and making altogether a great fun of splashing.

We followed, a trifle more serious, our boots sloshing a bit disagreeably. And yet somehow, such was the charm of her simplicity, we felt caught up with something of her spirit. We could not refrain from smiling at her capers.

"She's a little tomboy!" Fitz turned to smile at me. "A delicious little she-imp!"

I missed from behind me, all at once, the negro and the Dutchman. With an exclamation I brought the party to a halt. And then, as we halted, crept to our ears through the stillness of the jungle, the voice of De Jong:

"Ve is lost, Harry. Dot Vilhelm Hyde und his Golden Vimmon has left us pehind. *Mein* friendt, you stops too much to listen und look roundt. You has made us lose der Green, Green *Gott* vot dot vimmon carries. Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies."

His voice trailed away. Only could be heard then the merry trill of the brook as it rippled downstream and riffled about our legs.

After a little, from behind the curtaining streamers of lianas, the negro appeared, the water surging against his legs and soaking the riding-breeches where they buttoned tightly about his calves, the Dutchman holding to his belt and stumbling on after him. Glimpsing us, Christmas threw back his head and laughed echoingly.

"Yah, yah, yah! Sho', Mistah De Young, heah dey am waitin' foh us—Colyum an' Mistah Fitz an' dat li'l girl wot has de parrot yo' calls de Green, Green God!"

"Gif id to me!" exclaimed De Jong with sharp unexpectedness. "Gif id to me, der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies!"

And repeating this plea over and over in a fretful voice, he came pitching and wobbling on toward the girl, his hands outreaching and groping through the air.

A natural doubt appulsed on my brain. I doubted whether Butterfly of the Dark would turn the parrot over to the Dutchman. Possession of Mogul meant to her the saving, in all probability, of her father's life. Yet what else we could do to appease De Jong, I did not know. I looked at the girl; Fitz looked at the girl; and we showed, on the moment, a deep anxiety.

"*Amo-endun*," suggested Fitz tactfully, "little girl, you can take Mogul back, once we get into the Jallan Batoe."

She nodded slowly, as if weighing in her mind the advisability of some certain move. She was very thoughtful. She seemed to realize, then, to what a pass things had come, in what a terrible state was the Dutchman. And she answered our looks and words, at last, by doing the only act left for her to do.

She untied the leash of plaited grass-fibers from about her wrist and from about the left foot of the parrot. She threw the leash away. But Mogul, though free, did not move from her shoulder; only he widened his red eyes.

She put up her right hand to him. The parrot walked upon her hand and then, as he clung to her extended index finger, two toes before and two behind, she brought her hand back in a wide circle to De Jong's shoulder. Gravely, as if suddenly struck by the import of his eminence, the parrot strode, with bobbing head, off that finger and upon De Jong's shoulder.

De Jong's hand went up. He stroked the wings and breast of the bird. And his teeth clicked with a quick excitement.

"Id haf life!" he ejaculated. "Id is der deffel-deffel birdt! Id is varm mit life. *Herr Gott!*"

"Come along," said Fitz, waxing impatient over the delay. "Let us be going on."

We fell again into queer procession. The girl led. Fitz followed, carrying the fiddle. I came third, the negro behind me and, behind him, De Jong, the unleashed parrot nervously awake and tense upon his lurching shoulder.

Before us, on a sudden, the mountain slope took a sharp rise. It rose sheer and blank as a wall. And hollowing that wall was a great excavation, a tunnel yawning black and damp.

You have heard of the redwoods of California—giant Sequoias hollowed out at the base so that automobiles may pass two abreast through them. This tunnel was as large as that. It was more wonderful. It bored from the slope to the crater inside, through and through the living rock—a tunnel into the Jallan Batoe.

We entered that tunnel, feeling with our hands along the fungi-wet rock of one wall, plashing in the stream and tearing through the clammy feelers of the tall *cogon* grass which had sprouted in that stream like marshy growths. A wind was breathing through that tunnel like a cold whisper. It laid icy breaths on the back of my neck and on the tips of my ears; it shivered the *cogon* grass all about us; it was uncanny. I know that I, for one, shuddered.

And we could not see. It was as if we all were in the same boat as De Jong, as if we all were blind. About us, hemming us in, laying thick bandages before our eyes, was blackness, a sticky blackness, all-enveloping. We could not see.

The thing was shocking in all that blackness. I felt a pair of hands groping at my shirt. I jumped. And then, from behind me, appulsed on my ears, a shaken cry of fright:

"Dot vind! Hear dot vind whining like der sick animal t'rough dis blace? Dot's der shrieking deffel vot lords it ofer dese vet valls!"

"Don't be afraid, Conrad; it's only the wind," I said.

Then it struck me. Where was the negro? I asked the Dutchman.

"Oof!" he answered. "Dot poss-poy is alvays stopping und looking roundt. He say, 'Koenraad, you can see as good as me in dis plack tunnel.' Und he put my hands on der vet vall, und he say, 'go 'long!' Now, *mein* friendt, *mein* friendt, you get oudt of my vay."

I stepped out from the wall, allowing De Jong to grope his way past me, and looked back. My eyes had grown accustomed to the dark.

Behind me, I made out a disk of light. It looked like a spotlight thrown into the blackness of a stage. And framed in that disk of light, like an actor in a spotlight, was the black form of the negro, the rifle like a sooty poker in his hand. He was standing in the entrance to the tunnel.

I felt my way back toward that entrance. I desired to know what it was all about. As I drew near and the tunnel brightened, I noted that Christmas, facing me, was looking back over one shoulder and hearkening as if to some movement in the growths beyond the tunnel entrance.

I paused within an arm's length of him. He seemed unaware of my presence. I looked in the direction he was looking and I, too, hearkened.

The branch of some tree shoved out, like a finger, before the entrance. A showy little sunbird stood on that branch, his breastplate gleaming like exquisite jewelry in a stray shaft of sunlight. He was making elaborate preparations, as if for a song of triumph, twisting his little head this way and that, fluttering his wings, dipping up and down his thin curved beak and making, all in all, a great display of feathers and tail.

He emitted his song, finally, a very feeble cheep hard to hear. But in all that stillness of jungle, I heard it distinctly. It was all I did hear.

I stepped up to the negro.

"What are you listening for?" I asked bruskly.

He started as if shot; his head swung round as on a pivot; but he did not answer. He came closer to me, his head bent forward as in deep thought, his bare feet slapping through the water. Then, quite close to me, he said in a soft whisper, as if breathing a secret:

"It am dem ornery Lon Wai boys, suh. Ah t'ink dey am followin' us."

"Why, did you hear something?"

"Ah raiken Ah've been hearin' things all dis evenin', boss. Ah hearn a twig snap, not a spell back, an' anudder 'casion was jes' naow, when Ah seed a chunk ob earth come a-rollin' daown de bank an' splash into de ribber. Dose Lon Wai debbils has been followin' us, Ah cal'cate, sence we left dat clearin'." He nodded sagely.

With malice prepense, to scare out of him the thought I believed lurked in his woolly head, I said—

"It's the head-hunters, Christmas!"

The whites of his eyes showed very stark in the gloom of the tunnel entrance; but whether with fright or fear of discovery, I could in nowise tell.

"Lawdy, boss, dem head-hunters 'ud nebber come neah heah. No, no; dey am too skeered."

He leaned so close to me that I could feel his breath hot upon my face.

"It's dem Lon Wai debbils, Ah tells yo', boss," he said real confidentially. "Dey am awful ornery. Yo' wouldn't t'ink so, but jes' 'cause dey has gwine to a mission school, dey t'inks dey am as good as we-uns. Dat's so, boss. An' dat's why dey am followin' us in heah."

I nodded, though I hardly need to say that the negro's far-fetched logic failed altogether to convince me. Indeed, it convinced me otherwise. It filled my head with a tremendous idea. I thought that some persons were in truth following us. I thought that Harry Christmas knew well who those persons were. Down in the dingle, he had arranged for this pursuit. Those persons following us were the head-hunters.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE JALLAN BATOE

WITHOUT further ado, I turned and, closely followed by the negro, made through the tunnel. Our hands, outfeeling the way, rubbed along the wet-celled mosses on the rock wall. Ahead showed the disk of light which was the other entrance to the tunnel, the Jallan Batoe entrance. In the foreshortening of distance, it seemed very tiny; but as we went on and on, it grew like the diaphragm of a camera, opening wide and wider.

Once I paused to look back. As if actuated by a common spring, a common fear, the negro paused and looked back. Behind, far, far behind, I saw the jungle entrance to the tunnel, a disk of light no larger than a silver dollar. But what I failed to see, framed within that disk, was the shapes of men, of head-hunters. We seemed to have thrown off their trailing of us. Or perhaps it was that the Cimmerian blackness of the tunnel had filled them with an ungodly fear.

We pressed ahead. After a little, we missed the stream sloshing about our ankles. From our point of view, going upstream, it had sunk into the ground; but in reality, here was where the stream, in flowing out from the Jallan Batoe, first rose to the surface after pursuing an underground course from the *Danau*.

The disk of light ahead was now like some great bright eye. After a little, we saw, cutting off one margin of it like the cast in an eye, the moving silhouettes of the girl and Fitz and the Dutchman. The broad-brimmed, round-topped hat of the Dutchman gave him much the appearance of a squat, black-robed Japanese bonze; the unleashed parrot on his shoulder, farther from the wall, was like some black raven of augury.

We came up behind De Jong. The girl and Fitz, a step beyond, were expressing their wonder as to where we had gone. They seemed just then to have discovered that we were missing. Now, as they paused and I noted, in the brightening dark, that the girl had replaced on her feet the grass-woven sandals and rolled down her pantaloons, I announced our return.

We went on. The disk of light ahead grew and grew until it burst, like a rocket-bomb, into a spreading blaze of light. We were out of the mouth of the tunnel. The stark fingers of the sun were poking into our eyes. We blinked and looked about.

We were on a path of solid lava that permitted of only two persons walking abreast. To either hand, as high as our shoulders, lifted embankments of earth. On those embankments stretched, near and far away, a clutter of growths—great gnarled trees, huge caladium and pandanus, big red blood-creepers, white-blooming convolvulus, vivid orchids, mosses, scarlet loranthus, and ferns big as trees and ferns that hung in rank profusion from trees. It was another jungle.

Looking up, I saw overhead, at a stupendous height, the rim of the crater—lava slopes flowing down like spills of ink, peak upon peak towering above, beyond, and cutting through the splendid blue of the noon sky like the black teeth of some enormous rake.

After the limitlessness of the jungles, there was that about this ability to see the limits of our present world, immeasurable though those limits were, which seemed to have a dwarfing effect upon me. I felt hemmed-in, as if I were in prison.

That was my first thought. The next thought that impinged upon my brain had a quality that lifted me out of myself. It was as though I were atop one of those black jagged peaks, looking down through the years. For I realized, now and of a sudden, that I was in that place where few white men ever had been before, where no white man, save and excepting William Hyde alone, ever had been and lived to tell the tale. I was in the Jallan Batoe!

We were all of us in the Jallan Batoe. It was just as Hyde had described. Only, unlike Hyde had described, I noted now no scamper waving the foliage on the embankments, no sound of low voices back among the clutter of growths, no feeling of the presence of men near at hand at all.

"Where are they?" I asked Butterfly of the Dark. "Those sentries whom your father said guarded the mouth of this tunnel?"

Her brows drew together with perplexity.

"I do not know," she returned. "They were here when I came out, this dawning. They were changing the watches then—they always keep guard on this tunnel—and I stole by them when their backs were turned. But they do not change the watches at noon. They may be about us now, concealed by the growths, and we not know."

The idea sent a sort of shiver through me. Quickly I looked about. There seemed no one there among those green and gaudy growths. With nervous apprehension, I looked behind. I saw only the blackness of the tunnel.

I was right pleased, anyhow, I tell you, to follow the girl as she went along the path and, turning a bend in that path, brought us out at the head of the Avenue of Palms which Hyde so graphically had described to us.

Away and away it stretched, wide, carpeted with clipped grass, and bordered on each side by sentinel lines of palms and by stupendous stones that looked for all the world like *erratics*, those prodigious blocks of rock left stranded by glaciers of the Ice Period.

They were carved, those stupendous stones, chiseled and wrought into resemblances of elephants, of *bayaks* or large lizards, of huge hippopotami, of orang-utans, of one-horned rhinoceros, and of prehistoric reptilian-looking creatures. For all that they were pierced by caves and striated by steps leading up into those caves, they gave a very realistic effect as the immense mammals they represented were all postured in some attitude particularly native to them.

For instance. One stone was carved like a gigantic frog with its legs crouched under it, its forearms turned in; and there was even, on either side of its head, a protruding bulbous formation like a frog's eyes.

The stone likeness of a *remaung* or tiger was engraved with transverse bands to represent stripes. And perched upon the stone image of a hippopotamus was such a pest of *tenyalang* or rhinocheros hornbills that I almost expected to see the hippo duck down, as into water, to rid itself of the parasites upon its back.

Now, at the far end of the Avenue of Palms, I saw the hugest stone of all. It was white, dazzlingly white, like some colossal formation of limestone that had been pierced by basalt and thus been transformed into a beautiful snow of marble. It stood on the fringe of a dye-blue sheet of water which I took, right off, to be the *Danau*, and upon whose unruffled surface floated lilies in the large pads of which, not one *Little Tom* but as many as ten "water-babies" might have been cradled.

The contour of the monster mass of white stone was sharply outlined against the blue background of *Danau*. That contour showed that the white stone was carved somewhat after the fashion of the Egyptian Sphinx, with the beautiful face and flowering breasts of a woman, and the body of a horse, upstanding, flowing-tailed and bushy of mane. It was the sole stone in the Jallan

Batoe, that I could see, which was carved, in any degree, like a human being. It was, then, the Stone *Dobo* of Hyde's story, the great temple of the Poonan, their Holy of Holies.

I scanned, in looking toward that Stone *Dobo,* the whole extent of the Avenue of Palms. Well, now, a startling feature about that vista smote me. I remarked, in all that extent of avenue, no shape of man or woman.

There was no soft *flot* of sandaled feet on the grassy ways, no hallooing of herders on the slopes far away, no muffled pounding of rice-mortars, no *swack* of *dukus* flaying coconuts. There was no sound, as of men, at all. The whole crater gave the effect of some beautiful oasis that had been struck by plague and forsaken by its people—a paradise of tropic trees and growths, glorying in sunshine, yet empty of all human life, desolate as a grave.

"I do not understand it," said the girl, as if in answer to my thoughts. "Where are the Poonan? There are no Golden Women walking the avenue, there are no men gathering the dye leaves in that indigo plantation."

With a baffled look in her long green eyes, she pointed her hand toward where a field of plants of the leguminous order put out a pretty showing of blue flowers.

"Even the slaves no longer bend beneath the great leaves of the *pisang* trees in that walk over there," she ended, her hand sweeping round and indicating the cultivated growths between the huge stones "no longer wade between the stalks in that rice-paddy. Ooh, I do not understand where all the Poonan can be."

"Surely," I said, "they can not have fled the Jallan Batoe."

She shook her head so vehemently in dissent that the golden devil-chasers, about her forehead and red hair, danced and quivered like tremulous sun-motes.

"No, no, no; there is no reason for them to do that. But let us go on to the Elephant Stone, let us see if my fathaire is still there."

Now there was that in her mouthing of the name, Elephant Stone, which had a familiar ring in my ear. As she started down the avenue, I stopped her with a hand on her arm. And I said:

"The Elephant Stone? Isn't that the stone in which your father lived when he came into the Jallan Batoe the first time?"

"Yes, that is true," she returned, nodding. "We have occupied it, my fathaire and I, since my poor mothaire died. But the Poonan did not give over the use of this stone to us because of any idea of doing—what you say?—ooh, yes; reverence to my fathaire. They gave it over to us in respect for me. I am supposed some day, you know, to be Queen of the Poonan."

She smiled pathetically, as if there was to her, in the thought of some day being Queen of the Poonan, no joy but only a great sadness. Then on she led our queer procession toward the first stone on the right-hand side of the avenue—that stone shaped like an elephant bent on its clumsy knees as if to receive a burden.

We told off Harry Christmas to remain outside with De Jong. We feared that the Dutchman might raise some outcry were he to feel, in the darkness of the Elephant Cave, the sunlight no longer beating upon his swelled eyes.

Easily enough, we could have explained to De Jong just where we were going, as had been done in the matter of the tunnel, and laid upon him a strict injunction not to raise any outcry. But the truth is that this business about sunlight and swelled eyes was only the fallacious reasoning we gave to Harry Christmas in order to keep both him and the Dutchman outside the Elephant Cave.

Deep motives actuated us in thus placing them. To begin with, there was De Jong. He seemed, in his present deranged state of mind, to look upon Hyde as his enemy. He thought Hyde owned the Green, Green God. He suffered under the delusion that he carried the Green, Green God upon his own shoulder in the shape of Mogul, the parrot.

In the back of his head lurked, to be sure, the faint suspicion that I was William Hyde. But were he to hear us greet Hyde and fathom that Hyde was in truth about, he might fear that Hyde would demand back the parrot on his shoulder and, in fear, he might leap at the Englishman's throat. That day on the Barito, we had witnessed what De Jong was capable of doing when possessed by fear. We knew Hyde was only the wreck of a man. We wanted no murder done.

And Christmas. Christmas was De Jong's henchman. He was De Jong's henchman, it is true, because he thought he could handle De Jong where he knew he could not even begin to handle both or either of us. What De Jong got, he thought eventually to make his own. He was a double-dealer. We distrusted him and we feared him.

But effectively to cover up any distrust we might show, we ended by telling Christmas to keep his ears sharpened and his eyes wide open to anything unusual which might occur, out in the Jallan Batoe. Should he note, or even sense, anything unusual occurring, he was to warn us forthwith. We were taking no chances in anything.

CHAPTER XV

A SEARCH AND A SOLUTION

WE MADE now, the girl and Fitz and I, up a flight of nine stairs cut in the nearest bent foreknee of the Elephant Stone. We entered, at the top, a black arched hole which gave on to a corridor.

That corridor shaped round in a horseshoe to the entrance and staircase in the other foreknee. It was hung, along its walls, with orchids, ghostly rare blossoms fluttering from baskets of withes, draggling with a sort of wan lassitude from bits of bark, breathing like frail sighs from broken fronds of tree-ferns—an opalescent shimmer of topaz yellows, misty blues, glowing soft lilacs, pansy violets and reds, warm and rosy as the chalices of hibiscus.

Here where the sun was not too strong and yet dappled, during certain hours, the stony sweep of walls, here had been gathered this slow collection of years. It was the artistic invaluable collection, I realized, of a man who, now a connoisseur, had once been an orchid-hunter himself—William Hyde.

We circled the corridor, our nostrils tingling with the heady yet exquisite perfumes of the flowers. We came, near the center of the corridor, upon a doorway inset like a niche in the wall. Passing through, we found ourselves in a chamber that was a vast cave. The light that held in that chamber was like the twilight of a church; for the stark fingers of the day pushed through only where, in a few places in the lofty ceilings, slim apertures had been laboriously slitted through the stone.

There were no orchids here; but, near the doorway, there was every sign of human habitation. There were mats of fine texture spread upon the stone flooring; there was a rush-plaited couch to one side; and crude but civilized chairs, there were, and a round four-legged table.

A veritable arsenal was shrouded by the dark of one corner—nine-foot-long *sumpitans* of hollowed ironwood, pith balls, reed darts and *kliaus* or ornamented shields. I noticed particularly a rather modern Krag-Jorgenson rifle, and also a short, thick sword, called a *duku*, somewhat like a chopping-knife or machete which was used, like a machete, for cutting through thick underwood.

There was, besides, a *bliong* which might be used, with equal handiness, as an adz or an ax and with which Hyde, no doubt and with endless pains, had fashioned out the table, the chairs and, perhaps, even the girl's one-stringed fiddle.

A fireplace blackened the left-hand wall. Lending a homey aspect to it, a shining array of cooking utensils hung about. They were a complete camping set such as Hyde must have had when he had returned, six years before, to the Jallan Batoe.

Near the black mouth of the fireplace was fire-making apparatus: a heap of brittle leaves and dry tinder rot; a long block of some soft wood which looked, because of the many black holes bored in its surface, as if it had been nibbled by mice; and a long stick of *bilian* wood, with a kind of bow attached. The middle of the bow-string was sunk in a notch at the top of the *bilian* stick and the string itself partly wound about the stick. The end of the *bilian* stick rounded off into a sharp black hard point.

By working the bow up and down, the *bilian* stick could be made to gyrate rapidly. If set into one of the holes in the block of soft wood, the friction caused by the revolving stick would soon raise smoke and heat.

By the aid of some dry tinder rot and leaves, the fire might then be blown into a blaze. It would take an expert, of course, to accomplish the feat; but no doubt, in the years, Hyde had become expert in this primitive art of making fire.

Thus, of Hyde's occupancy we found many a sign, but of the man himself there was never a sign. It appeared, as we searched, that Hyde and his daughter had inhabited only that portion of the cave chamber near the doorway. We went round the walls into the remote recesses of the great cave-chamber, the fingers of light above faintly showing the way. We did not find Hyde.

We came back to the doorway, the beat of our hearts a bit quickened. As we did, I noted to the other side of the doorway, the right-hand side, three beautiful plaited mats strung up on bamboo poles and partitioning off a space. I did not doubt, the moment I saw it, but that it was Butterfly of the Dark's private apartment, what might in civilization be called her boudoir.

She had not been with us in the search round the cave-chamber. She had been searching her own apartment. For now, as we came back, empty-handed and fear-filled, she brushed aside one of the mats and appeared, a knuckle of perplexity knitting her little brow, a look of troubled concern widening her eyes. She shook her head.

"He is not here," she said.

"He is nowhere to be found in the Elephant Stone," Fitz affirmed slowly.

Just then there came the sound of naked feet patterning hurriedly through the corridor. In rushed Harry Christmas, his eyes like two saucers, his lips twitching.

"Mistah Colyum! Mistah Fitz!" he cried. "Ah jes' seed some Poonans gwine into dat white stone daown de avenue! Dere mus' be a heap ob dem inside!"

For a trice, as realization impinged upon our brains, Fitz and I stared at each other. So this, then, was the reason why no Poonan were straying about the Jallan Batoe. They were gathered in the Stone *Dobo!*

The knuckle on the girl's forehead deepened as with pain. In her long green eyes there bourgeoned, then quickened and became instant, a look of appalled horror, of overwhelming terror. She clutched at one of the hanging mats.

"They have taken him to the Stone *Dobo!*" she cried, swaying. "They are torturing him! Ooh, my fathaire, my fathaire! What shall we do, what shall we do?"

Fitz swung round. He grabbed the girl by the hand. Dragging her after him he disappeared through the doorway.

"To the *Dobo*, to the *Dobo!*"

His voice rang out from the corridor, and echoed and reechoed through the vast cave-chamber.

Realization stayed me no longer. I leaped through the doorway. Harry Christmas followed a jump behind.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE AVENUE OF PALMS

OUTSIDE the Elephant Stone, beneath one of the picket palms, Conrad De Jong stood, looking quite forlorn, his broad-brimmed Chinese sun-hat shadowing his bandaged eyes, the parrot asleep, in the sun and quietude, upon his shoulder.

"Harry, *mein* friendt," he was saying, as we raced down the stairs, "vhy need ve vait here in dis Jallan Batoe? I haf der Green, Green *Gott* here on my shoulder, alretty. Und you tells me vunce to get rid of dot bum, Fitz. Shush so. Ve vill leave dot Fitz und dot Hyde und his Golden Vimmon pehind us!"

I reached the foot of the stairs. I made straight for him. As I came toward him he leaned nearer the areca palm, one hand outreaching, and said *sotto voce:*

"*Harry, mein Kamerad,* I tells you sumdings. Ve vill go down der Barito to Banjer masin. Old Sui-Bui-Quin, der Chinese *toko*-keeper who sold us der supplies, he vill try to puy der Green, Green *Gott.* Bud ve vill not id sell. Ve vill go on, across der seas, to Amsterdam und der Van Dam factories there. I vill gif you a biece of der tail of der Green, Green *Gott*, und dey vill make id into a ring for you. Bud der rest, Koenraad de Jong vill keep——"

I was up to him then. I grabbed hold of his outreaching hand. I dragged him into the middle of the avenue.

"You wait here," I said, my voice shaking despite all my attempt at self-control. "Give us the parrot. We need it; give us the parrot in a hurry. It's no use for you to trail along after us. You can't see. You'd be no good. Give us the parrot and and we'll return it to you——"

His voice lifted.

"*Nein, nein!*" he shouted. "You don't fool me, Vilhelm Hyde. Return id, no! You don't get id, neffer! I gif you a pit of a biece for der ring, bud der birdt is *mein, mein, mein!*"

Fitz interposed at that moment. He said no word, but his interposition was as startling as if he had cursed. He pointed down the avenue.

I shaded my eyes with my hands, for, since I had lost my hat that day on the Barito, I had been forced to go bareheaded. I looked in the direction he indicated. There, down the Avenue of Palms and just entering it from some other highway which bisected it, were a number of *jarrat*-girted men, their light bronze skins shining in the sunlight, their long *sumpitans* pointing up over their shoulders like exclamation marks.

The while I watched, they drew near to the Stone *Dobo*. They mounted the wide white sweep of cathedral stairs. But they seemed unable to enter. They clustered about the rectangular-shaped doorway of the *Dobo* like a swarm of bees about the mouth of a hive.

"The Poonan are foregathered within," said Fitz. "There are already so many of the Poonan, within that *Dobo*, these late comers can't enter——"

"And they are torturing my fathaire!" breathed the girl in a cold whisper, her throat throbbing, her eyes frozen by horror into tearless green pools. "Oh, my fathaire, my fathaire!"

Fitz looked into those frozen green pools in her marble face, and the veins stood out on his forehead, high and blue. He swore then, horribly, without thought of apology.

"Let's not stand here like ninnies!" he bit out. "Come on! What's the matter with you—paralyzed? Come on, come on!"

"But De Jong," I began, and I reached for the parrot on the Dutchman's shoulder.

Somehow, ere it was accomplished, the Dutchman sensed what I was up to. He lurched back. His voice shrilled into a wail:

"*Mein, mein!* Der Green, Green *Gott* is *mein!* Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies——"

Fitzhamon's voice exploded, even as the Dutchman continued to wail.

"Blast you! Will you shut up? We're not after the Green, Green God now. Don't you see this girl here? Don't you hear her? We're trying to save her father."

"But, Fitz, we can't save her father——"

"Can't!"

"Unless we have the parrot Mogul with us. He's the big factor. De Jong won't give him up."

"Oh, bring De Jong along!" said Fitz disgustedly. "Come on! Let's get out of here and to the *Dobo*."

He took the girl by the hand once more and started down the avenue.

"Here, Harry," I said to the negro, and I motioned him to take De Jong by the other hand. Thus dragging De Jong between us, following after Fitz and the girl, we ran down the avenue straight for the Stone *Dobo*.

No one stopped us. No Poonan darted out from behind a palm to point the muzzle of a *sumpitan* at us and blow from swelled cheeks a poisoned dart; no Poonan leaped up from the hedging growths to flesh a glittering *mandau* in our bodies; no Poonan ran before us, raising a higgledy-piggledy of shouts. Without mishap, running fast, we drew close to the Stone *Dobo*.

All at once, the huddle of men about the pillared doorway of the *Dobo* caught sight of us. A murmuring floated to our ears. I saw one of the number dart through the huddle and make inside. The murmuring rose. It was like the far-off rumble of a railway train growing loud and louder. It rose into an ominous roar. It came from within the Stone *Dobo*, out through the thousand apertures. The Poonan foregathered within knew, now, that we were coming.

Everything was happening in a tittle of time. The huddle of *jawat*-girted men at the head of the white cathedral stairs broke. They came down the stairs like a wash of gnats, each man for himself, shoving, leaping three steps at a time, shouting; and every man striving to be the first one to us, the dangling ends of their *jawats* snapping behind them, their *sumpitans* waving in the air like erratic lightning zigzags, their empty scabbards knocking against their bronze legs, and their naked *mandaus* throwing off the sunlight in glinting flashes.

Men and more bronze men pressed out after them through the doorway of the Stone *Dobo*. That great pillared doorway exuded men as a pomegranate exudes seeds, as a volcano exudes lava. They flowed down the white sweep of stairs. They came up the avenue, their *sumpitans* crowding the air like a forest of stripped trees.

We did not stop. Unflinchingly leading the way was Fitz, his Irish heart fired by a tremendous purpose and recking naught of consequences or ills. The red-haired girl held to his hand and, with a fortitude amazing, a strength one would never expect to find in so frail a person, ran along beside him. The negro boss-boy and I followed, dragging between us the muttering blind Dutchman.

Those of the Poonan who had composed the huddle upon the top of the cathedral stairs and hence were in the lead, were by now very near to us and rapidly coming nearer. They saw, of a sudden, the girl. They called her name, as if in a great wonderment. Then, ere the echoes of their surprised cry had drifted away, they set up a shouting that was like the cat-calling of a mob in a theater, like the vituperation of a people outraged.

"*Tugong, tugong!*" they howled. "Traitor, traitor! You have shown *akal*-plandok, the cunning of the mouse-deer. You have brought in *Orang Mohong*, friends of your father, enemies of the Poonan—white men! Traitor, traitor!"

I knew then. They thought that Butterfly of the Dark had gone outside the Jallan Batoe, and securing us, the hated white men, had returned with us to help her father. They did not know, then, her real reason for going outside. They had not yet seen Mogul.

But, of a sudden, as they came up to the girl and closed about her and Fitz like a pack of ravenous wolves, they saw behind Fitz and the girl, perched upon one shoulder of the little Dutchman, the parrot, Mogul.

The menace fled from their slant eyes. They stood still, shocked, paralyzed.

Their slant eyes filled with a fear horrible to behold. And the only thing that moved about them was their nostrils. Partly from the exertion of the run, but a great deal more from fear, their nostrils pulsed like beating hearts. And a kind of whisper, more fearful than any shout, that was like the sighing of a dying wind among palm tufts, swept through them; and they gasped:

"*Burong-Raya-Kas-Kas-Deewa!* For the second time he has come back. The bird that is like the Green, Green God! *Ahe!* He is himself some *Toewan Deewa*, some Great God!"

Down thereat upon their knees, they went. About the girl, before the girl, in rank after serried rank, down they went upon their knees and bowed their heads in the grass. The lawn of avenue, the white sweep of stairs of the Stone *Dobo*, the whole visible stretch of the Jallan Batoe before us, became in a trice a sea of bowed and bended heads.

CHAPTER XVII

WILLIAM HYDE

WE WENT on. Shocked though we were by this reception, but attempting to act as if we had expected no less, on we walked down that Avenue of Palms between those bowed ranks, those bent backs. Our try to save Hyde seemed then on a winning rise.

Up the white sweep of stone stairs we made. The Poonan kneeling and bowed upon those stairs were like a motley of beggars upon a cathedral stairs at a religious festival. She came, at the head of those stairs, to the deep wide doorway which was imbedded in the monster block of stone between the high outlines of the forefeet of the half-horse, half-woman.

That doorway was columnated on either side by nine slim white pillars. Between the double doors were flung back. And within, on the snowy flooring, knelt a multitude of women.

They were the Golden Women. Black of hair, piquantly slant of eye, and subtly-colored of skin to the hue of gold. The gowns they wore, of the colorful feathers of peacock and pheasant, and of *katupong* and *kutok* and other showy omen birds of the jungle, sparkled iridescently under the beams of sunlight that shot through the thousand narrow apertures in the white walls. Their hair swept the flooring. The word had been passed to them that the parrot had returned and they were bowed, now, in a kind of humility and fear.

On we went along an aisle which showed between those immovable rows of women. We were in a columnated cavern, vast and round as the Pantheon of Rome. And the only sounds to be heard in all that cavernous temple were the ringing of our footfalls upon the stone pavement, the scraping of De Jong's dragging feet and the incessant mumble of his muttering voice.

But we no more had passed a dozen rows of those women than they bobbed up behind us, like lines of glorious sunflowers lifting after a bowing breath of wind. And some form of awed whispering ran through them.

De Jong heard that whispering. His hand pulled from my grasp and ran up my arm to my biceps. He grasped me tightly by the biceps.

"Do you hear dem?" he whispered. "Voices und lights und feathery sounds. Und I can't see dem. Vhisperings und signalings und goings-on all aboud me, und I can't see dem. Bud you von't led dem get me. You'll stay by me, von't you? You'll help me keep der Green, Green *Gott*, der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer——"

"You're twisting my arm. Let go."

"*Himmel!* I'll kill you if you don't help me!"

The Dutchman's face pressed close to mine. His breath came in wheezing gasps. His face was livid to the throat.

I knew fear of the man then. I threw off his hand from my arm.

Instantly his mad anger fled. His helplessness seemed borne in upon him. He groped about almost pleadingly with his hand.

"*Nein, nein;* I didn't mean dot. You is nod angry, Vilhelm Hyde. You is nod angry at poor Koenraad de Jong."

"That's all right, De Jong, that's all right." I took hold of his hand again. "It's not as bad as you think. Gather, old man; just pull yourself together. There is no reason to be frightened. There's only women about us, that's all."

The sweat stood out on his forehead and neck. His face was wrinkled into countless lines as he sought to get control of himself.

"Dot's all," he said. "Shust a pit frightened, dot's all. Koenraad de Jong, he's all right now, Und you und him vill stick togedder. Vilhelm Hyde, I tells you sumdings. I'll gif you a biece of der tail of der Green, Green *Gott* to be made into der ring, vot?"

The negro boss-boy, dragging De Jong by the other hand, had been an interested spectator all this while. Now he spoke up, a sly grin on his lean Afro-Arabian face.

"An' ole Harry, too. Yo' hain't fohgettin', Mistah De Young, dat ole Harry Christmas am entitled to a piece ob dat emeral', am yo'?"

The Dutchman looked a trifle scared over this new proposition. Yet he said, quite magnanimously:

"Oof, dot's all right. I gif you a biece, too, Harry, mein freindt. Shust us three."

We had progressed, by now, half-way up the aisle. Out of the dazzle of sunbeams upon white stone walls, the other end of the cave-temple took definite shape. I saw, at this end, a large elevated dais railed off, in front, by a balustrade carved out of white stone and hung, behind, with some wonderful tapestry—a rare old Chinese rug draping from a knobby bamboo pole and glowing with colors.

Between, on the dais, were nine *narra kliaus* or mahogany shields raised aloft, like high altars, upon slim fingers of white stone. They were set about by red fires which licked up from inverted gongs of gold. And six of those shields upbore, like saucers, glittering heaps of jewels.

Marvelous idols of jade and green jasper, tiaras of gold, gem-studded necklaces and anklets, there were; bejeweled imitations of flowers, fishes, birds and bells, suns and moons and crescents; bracelets, vases, armlets, rings and lavallieres. Sapphires purer than the sapphire of George IV.; rubies bloodier and huger than that of the Black Prince; diamonds more priceless than the Florentine Diamond of Charles the Bold, finer than the Sancy Diamond of Queen Elizabeth, larger even than the Kohinoor!

This, all this, was that incalculable treasure of the Poonan which they had garnered when, as Tartars of Genghis Khan, they had conquered the Sea Dyaks of Borneo, hundreds of years before, and levied tribute, in the form of these jewels, from them.

Lying flat upon a seventh *kliau*, I noted the broken half of a great massive *Mandau* or sword. It was concave on one side and convex on the other, for all the world like a Turkish scimitar, save that it had but one cutting edge. It was topped off by a hilt that was made of ivory, bound by threads of gold and inset with precious stones. The end of it broke off jaggedly, like a piece of shattered glass. The sharp tapering point of it was missing.

But with that sharp tapering point, this half of sword had once formed the *Mandau* of Genghis Khan about which Hyde had told us. It had been that very menacing *Mandau* of Genghis Khan which, when he had been made the great marshal king years before, Hyde had broken into two pieces with one smash across his knee.

Now, upon the eighth shield, reposed an immense emerald, larger even than the Goddess of Emeralds of the Incas which was as big as an ostrich egg—fully one foot long, and miraculously carved into the mirror-like semblance of a green parrot!

A thrill ran through me, as I saw that shimmering green parrot and, to save myself, I could not keep from turning my head round to compare it with the living parrot, Mogul, upon De Jong's shoulder. They were the same, identically the same, even to the festooning along the margin of the bills, the pointed wings, the short square tail, and the narrow membrane which united the two foretoes of either foot at their base.

I was glad then, for once, that De Jong

could not see. He would have rushed up the stairs upon that dais, grabbed up the Green, Green God and then, though the Poonan were all about him, tried to steal away with it.

For this emerald was indeed as mossy green as the still jungle. It was green and green. It was imperishable. It could never die. It was stupendous, prodigious. It should not have been in this world of selfishness. One itched to own it. It was a thing to dream of, to work to gain as one would work to gain heaven. It was a thing of God. It was a god itself. It was the Green, Green God.

Now, between that god and the shield bearing the hilted half of sword, there sat, upon the central ninth shield, the one set farthest back from the balustrade, a man. His legs were drawn up under him; he sat upon his hams; and sitting thus, upon the lofty dais and the loftier shield, he looked colossal—indeed, among all those glittering jewels and red fires, like some immense and imperturbable Chinese Joss.

His beard was no dog-collar, red as blood, encircling his face; it was a mat, white as driven snow and spreading over his chest from shoulder to shoulder. His face was not sun-saffroned and round as a moon; it was long, angular and slickly pale as though from extended confinement. For all that, I knew him for whom he was. His eyes were blue, a crisp light blue that never wavered from us as we made toward him up the aisle. He was William Hyde!

Yes; William Hyde it was, sitting, as he once had sat, upon the *Tojout-Plo-Sie*, the Nine-Times-Nine Throne of the Tartar Khanate. Why the Poonan had set him up once more upon that throne, I could not, for the life of me, conceive. I only knew that, standing at his back like some feudal henchman, was a squat, brown, muscular man, slant of eye. The ends of his *jawat* dangled between his thick legs; a strip of *pehang* skin, brindled black and orange, was flung across his deep chest. He was a chieftain, to judge from the *pehang* skin. I had no doubt he was that chieftain Hyde called the Gunner.

Behind the Gunner, standing in line against the old, old Chinese rug which glowed undyingly with a picture of Genghis Khan himself, I noted now, nine youngish men, the warmly colored skins of tigers draping from their shoulders as the insignia of their office. They were the priests.

They had not rushed out when the Poonan had made to set upon us; they stood now with heads humbly bowed; yet despite all the humility of their attitude, it did not escape me that they were thus hedging Hyde so closely as a guard.

I even noted, in the hands of one of the priests, the missing half of the sword of Genghis Khan. It was the dagger-like, sharp and tapering point.

I knew then. The torturing of Hyde had not yet begun. It never would begin, I hoped, now that we had returned with the parrot—Hyde's instrument of dread and power. But still, sight of that dagger-like point in the hands of the priest caused me to realize, with a shudder, just how close had Hyde come to death.

The Poonan had been about to carry out, I surmised, the first article of the *Ondong-Ondong*, the written law of the land. That first article, according to my knowledge, prescribes death after the Malay fashion. The dagger-like point in the hands of the priest would have been inserted within the clavicle bone on the left side and pushed downward to the heart.

I reviewed the scene. Before Hyde had been the women, and the *jawat*-girted men who now were filing silently in around the walls; behind had been the guard of nine priests; there had been no way for Hyde to jump, no way for him to escape.

Upon that throne from which he once had dominated them, the Poonan had placed Hyde in order to torture and to kill him. They had meant that Nine-Times-Nine Throne to be his death-bed—the death-bed of him who once had sat upon the throne as their great marshal king! It was a hideous irony.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE REASON WHY HARRY CHRISTMAS LOOKED BACK

WE REACHED the foot of the stairs leading to the dais. Here Butterfly of the Dark released her hand from Fitzhamon's grasp and, in an ecstasy of joy at finding her father alive, bounded up the nine stairs, flung open the white stone gate in the balustrade and, rushing to Hyde, embraced him rapturously.

We followed more sedately. I could not

refrain, the while, from turning my head from the Green, Green God to Mogul and mentally comparing the two.

We reached the white stone gate at the head of the stairs. Well, as we did, I saw the flesh-colored lids roll up over Mogul's eyes like window-shades. He saw the Green, Green God, there on the shield beside Hyde. His red eyes seemed to blaze and up he winged, quick as a flash, from De-Jong's shoulder.

De Jong felt the weight of the parrot lift from his shoulder; he sensed the parrot's action; and frantically he made to grab it. But Mogul was away. He fluttered down beside the Green, Green God and touched his dentated bill to the festooned emerald bill of the god. It was as if he thought the god were alive, a real parrot, and thus was making love to it.

"Oh, you old imitator!" I heard Hyde ejaculate.

He released one arm from about his daughter's waist, reached over, took the bird on the extended index finger of his hand, and placed him upon his shoulder. Mogul nestled down against his white beard and, as if tired out by the arduous events of the day, batted his red eyes in seeming sleep.

The picture Hyde presented then, with the parrot asleep upon one shoulder, was the same picture he had presented, in a measure, six years prior in Honolulu. It was much the same picture, too, that he had presented to the Poonan when he had returned into the Jallan Batoe.

The Poonan saw that picture. Behind and below us, in mixed wonder and fear, they had been watching our every move. They saw that picture. They bowed down and up as in some rite of reverence. And they wailed, a kind of fear shaking their voices:

"The bird that is like the Green, Green God! *Arre!* The father of the bird that is like the Green, Green God!"

"And then some, bee-lieve me!" came from Mogul, his head cocking up, his eyes gleaming open, red as the flames of the torches in the gold gongs about.

And he went on with the rigmarole. Taking the Poonan's double reference to the Green, Green God as a cue, he finished off with a *cluck, cluck!* and began over again. His shrill voice clipped out distinctly amid all that wailing of voices. It added to the effect he already had produced by alighting upon the shoulder of Hyde.

Now, all the while since Mogul had fluttered up from his shoulder, all that while De Jong had remained silent, his jaw slack and sagging as in dumb amaze. Well, on the sudden, as the parrot repeated the rigmarole, he leaped into life. He pulled his hands from ours, tottered through the gateway and pitched toward Hyde.

"Der Vilhelm Hyde!" he shouted, his hands outreaching and groping through the air. "Id's der Vilhelm Hyde again, und he has stolen der *Gott*, he has stolen der *Gott!* Gif dot back to me! Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies——"

Fitz, who had been preceding us, caught De Jong by one arm and stopped him within five feet of Hyde. As he held him, Hyde turned to us and, with one arm about his daughter, her red and rakishly capped head resting against his shoulder, the parrot alertly watchful on the other shoulder looked us over with a vast surprise showing in his crisp blue eyes.

"Yes, I'm Willyum Hyde," he said as if in answer to De Jong's shouts, a rolling note in his deep voice, his white-maned head nodding.

He squinted through the torchlight at Fitz; a look of recognition sprung into the crisp blueness of his eyes; and he exclaimed aloud.

"Fitzhammon, ——!" he ejaculated in a great wonder. "If it isn't Fitzhamon of British North Borneo whom I last met, only to fight with, in Kauai! And the Frisco lad —yes, the Frisco lad whom I told my story to, six years ago, in the *Fairhaven!* God A'mighty, how come you here?"

I noticed that his voice sounded unnaturally distinct. The next moment I understood the whyfore of it. The Poonan had gone silent. The instant De Jong had pitched toward Hyde, they had gone silent, every last man and woman of them. They were watching us now, their almond eyes agleam as with expectancy. It was as if we were enacting before them, there on the dais of the Stone *Dobo*, some startling drama which they could not fully understand but in which they were wholly absorbed.

Fitz stepped up to Hyde and, with a word of greeting, shook him warmly by the hand. But Fitz failed to answer Hyde's question as to how we happened to have come there. Wherefore Hyde asked, as I shook hands—

"Say, what in the world do you do here—here of all places?"

I looked at the girl in the curve of Hyde's arm.

"Tell him, Butterfly of the Dark," I said.

In unalloyed astonishment, Hyde gazed at his daughter. She colored furiously, to the hue of her hair.

"Ooh, fathaire," she began tremulously, in her quaint English. "This dawning, I went outside to find Mogul, and I met these men, and——"

Ere she could finish, De Jong once again and quite frantically, lifted his voice.

"*Mein, mein!* Der Green, Green *Gott* is *mein.* All der vay up der Barito, all der vay into der Jallan Batoe, I come for id. Gif id back to me. Der Green, Green *Gott* dot neffer dies, dot neffer dies——"

Hyde listened, his eyes squinted as if he were trying to catch the sense of De Jong's words. Then, his brow ruffled with great perplexity, he interrupted to ask:

"What's the matter with this bandaged Dutchman—he's a Dutchman, isn't he? I thought so; he sounds like it—" as we nodded. "But what's he crying about?"

Simultaneously Fitz and I tapped our foreheads. It was the easiest way to make ourselves understood in the din of De Jong's shouts. And, for a surety, it hit off De Jong.

SLOWLY Hyde stroked his white mat of beard, like some sage turning over in his mind a principle that would later astound the world. He kept looking from one to the other of us, now at Fitz, now at me, now in unconcealed surprise at the negro, now fixedly at the Dutchman. He studied the Dutchman.

De Jong found it fruitless to try to break from the hold of Fitz and myself. His shouts died down. And, thereat, Hyde said, looking at us:

"Is it really so that the Dutchman is crazy? Or did you indeed come for the Green, Green God?"

A queer light held, as he spoke, in Hyde's eyes.

I did not answer. I could not fathom the meaning of that light in Hyde's eyes. But stoutly Fitz returned:

"Some of us came for the Green, Green God—" nodding toward Christmas and the Dutchman significantly—"but Colum boy and I came, Hyde, in an effort to help you get out. We heard Mogul shrilling your rigmarole miles away in the jungle and we thought it was you, gone crazy up here and in need of our aid."

"If that be so," said Hyde, and the light in his eyes coalesced into a flinty look of bitterness, "if that be so, well, I'll be glad to have your aid. I have a big score to settle with these Poonan. There was Golden Feather of Flame, debased, worked like a beast of burden in the fields, made a slave—ay, she who was my wife and had been marshal queen of the Poonan was, for twelve years, a slave of these Poonan! And there's these broken legs of mine, hocked, hamstrung, ruined!"

He tapped the flabby limbs bent under him. His blue eyes smoldered like cold stars in an outraged heaven.

"You can help me pay that score. That's why I've stayed on here for six years. Day on day, for six years, I've stayed on here for my revenge!"

He broke off. A pitiable and almost envious light sprung to his eyes. Ere we could say a word, he repeated, his eyes looking over the heads of the Poonan into the white distance:

"Six years! And you've been out in the world, out where there are whites and show-windows all that time!" He nodded slowly. Softly he murmured: "God!"

I realized in a poignant flash then. The man was starving for news of what was going on out in the world.

"Tell me," he asked suddenly, looking full at Fitz, "how is that little weazened old pub-keeper, Malay Muk? It's been a long time between drinks for me down there. Six years. I wonder will I ever see that bamboo-wattled shack over the Kween again, and the mat-spread tables?"

"Oh, sure you will," said Fitz.

"That's just what we came for—to bring you out," said I.

Fitz and I made, thereupon, a determined effort to cheer him up. The while Fitz gave Hyde some of the gossip of the Baujer *campongs*, I twisted my head round to glimpse the Poonan spread below us. They were still engrossed, to the exclusion of all else, in watching us.

I tightened my grip upon the arm of De Jong. Then I listened to Fitz.

Fitz told how old Sui-Bui-Quin, the crafty Chinese *toko*-keeper, was slated to be *Ronggo* of the Chinese quarter. How Manuel

Dree, the bucko captain of the *Parangan of Borneo*, had come back from Niboli Pass with the *Flying Fish* stinking with pearls. How the Reverend Mr. Eben Goode had been made a *buli* of one of the Fiji Islands and had gone into commercial shark-fishing for fins and oil with greater ardor than ever he had gone into the task of saving souls.

I helped Fitz out. I related that sad case of Dr. Vander Laan, the Dutch resident of Banjermasin who, driven to murderous insanity by malarial fever, had run amuck just like an ordinary fanatical Malay.

"Old Ross is dead, you know," I said by way of ending our gossiping, "and his son is now King of the Kokos Islands."

Hyde drank in our words with avidity.

"King of the Kokos!" he exclaimed. "Well, I was *Raj* of the Poonan. I, Willyum Hyde, a ne'er-do-well Englishman, *Toewan Orlok Raj* of the Poonan! Ah, I had a queen then—Golden Feather of Flame! Yet have I no regrets today—no grief over my fallen estate, nothing save a righteous anger over my ruined body; for today I have my daughter."

He looked at the girl and his eyes shone radiantly with love; then quickly he turned to us again and that old starved look crept back into his eyes.

"And still, do you know," he sighed; "often and often, during the last six years, have I wished for my old shells and pea, and a coil of bewildered black-and-tans as in the old days!"

He seemed ever to hark back to these somber thoughts, as if he were disquieted by some foreboding of an impending great misfortune. Well suddenly, as in answer, we received tidings, if not of that misfortune, at least of a certain misfortune.

Into the *Dobo* rushed a Poonan. He paused just inside the deep pillared doorway. He waved his curved *mandau*. In a loud voice, shaken by terror, he cried:

"The *Orang-Benua!* They are in the Jallan Batoe. They are streaming down the Avenue of Palms! The head-hunters, the head-hunters!"

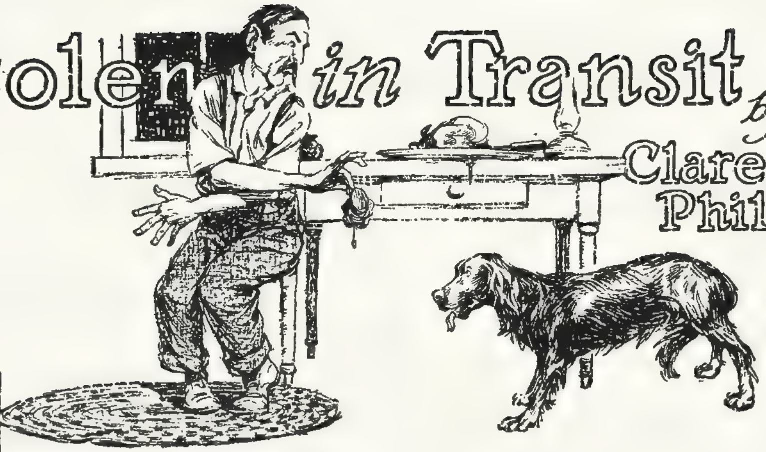
Harry Christmas leaped into galvanic life. He danced on his bowed legs about the dais.

"Ah knowed it, Ah knowed it!" he ejaculated, his lean Afro-Arabian face working like a monkey's. "Dat am *Dau-Dau-Makai* and *Ipo-Ipo-Utan*, a-leadin' theah head-hunters! Ah tole dem to come on, Ah tole dem it was easy as all git-out. Dey am gwine to take de heads ob all dese heah Poonans. We am to help dem. An' de Green, Green God am to be ourn!"

TO BE CONCLUDED.

Stolen in Transit

by Clarence Phillips



HANK FOWLER coveted two possessions. One was Wheatville's office of police chief. The other was another good bird-dog. Right now as he stood on the depot platform his immutable yearning for the latter caused his hands to open and close achingly.

The strange sensations he felt were prompted by the presence of four fine-looking dogs in crates. They had been dropped off at Wheatville by the Central Northern for transfer to the L. Q. & T. In one of the crates was an Irish setter, a beauty of deep red dye, with physical endowments which evidently had been passed on to it by a long line of silk-stockinged forebears.

"If I only had that dog; if I only had that dog," the voice of Hank's hungry heart cried to his twitching fingers.

It would not match "Sneezer," his beloved pointer, in color, shape, or style afield; but such trifles with him were as inconsequential as his credit at the bank. Open season for quail was but a short time off and he simply must acquire a running-mate of reliable brand for the other dog. Now this encaged classic at his feet was the —just the—the very——

He pushed aside a slat to obtain a better view of the traveling canine and to his surprise found that the board could be pulled out entirely. Instinctively he gave a little jerk at the next slat, and the next one to that—further ascertaining that all of them could be removed.

Then his hands began to itch again for something he did not have. Their knobbed tentacles swam in restless circles. He put the slats all back in place and scratched his stubbled chin—scratched with the melody of a carpenter sandpapering a piece of wood. Hank thought hard and wickedly.

A tousled, long-haired poodle with a ludicrously human face—a prototype of the venerable King Lear—came romping joyfully down the platform. It sniffed at the crates, jumped on one of them and gave Sneezer a nose kiss. Next it danced off a few feet, barked as if it had done something smart and bowed at the laughing Sneezer with both forelegs planted out in front of it stiffly. A moment later it was wriggling under Hank's arm as he pulled out slats of the setter's crate with his free hand. Little time was lost in passing a string about the fine red dog's neck and hauling it out, while a few seconds later King Lear was a prisoner.

"There you are, Whiskers," said Hank, giving the poodle a last look. "I certainly want to extend my congratulations to the feller that hunts quail with you this Fall. You'll make him some bird detective. You sure will."

He looked furtively about him. No one in sight anywhere. Gripping the end of a leash in each hand he started for home with Sneezer and the added asset. The setter dragged reluctantly behind. Now and then it would lie down stubbornly, wave its legs in the air and glower, when he coaxed.

"Off his diet," Hank commented to himself. Then addressing the new dog: "Just wait, ol' boy till you get back on three squares a day. This travelin' business always got my goat too."

In reply the stolen setter growled and

snapped at the bewhiskered bottom of Hank's trousers.

"Hey, cut that out," he commanded, jerking back his foot so violently that his heel knocked a painful yelp out of Sneezer. "You sure must be hungry. A feller could tell that by looking at them sickish eyes. We'll hit the feedbag, ol' boy."

Hank's heel again thudded against Sneezer's ribs.

"Listen here," he yelled at the new dog, "you ain't known me long enough yet to get fresh like that. Stop them attacks right now. It makes me ashamed of you anyhow. My shins are so sour even the chickens have quit pickin' at 'em—an' then you come along—a real highbrow of a dog—an' spot 'em for a banquet. Now, as long as you are my guest you'll get real cow meat and other nice things for your eats. Come on now, like a good bo, so as we can hunt up the menu."

Hanging its head almost to the ground and with eyes transfixed the setter responded to a kick in the ribs and rose to its feet. After snapping once more at its new master's legs it consented to be led.

Finally Hank reached home and brought out half of the roast his wife had cooked for dinner. The setter sniffed at the meat but drew away without eating. Hank held a succulent hunk over its nose. For thanks he was snapped at again. By this time he was convinced of the necessity of a muzzle and indefinite solitude for the animal.

When he left on his afternoon's trip to the post-office the new dog wore a wire mask and looked at a lame chicken in front of it as dolefully as a catcher who has overthrown second base.

* * *

HANK pored over catalogues of sporting goods in the hardware store for four hours before he was ready again to point his toes homeward. At first he decided that it would be prudent for him to avoid the railway station for a few days, just to be on the safe side of things. On second thought, however, he rendered a final verdict that he could do nothing more foolish. He could not afford to be conspicuous by his absence. It was toward the depot that he turned his steps.

"The very fellow I've been looking for all over town," greeted Franklin, the agent, as soon as Hank swung open the door of the former's private den.

"Why, what's the matter? Got a job for me?" Hank asked with an air of innocence.

"Job? Job? Job be hanged!" wailed the agent. "You've got yourself in a bee—u—tiful mess, that's what. That's what."

"Mess," repeated Hank, rolling the word over and over on his tongue to see if he had ever tasted it before. "What did I mess?"

"Bah!" spat the agent disgustedly. "Don't come any of that opery house stuff on me." Then he banged his fist on his desk and yelled.

"You know what? That dog you stole out there on the platform is—*mad*. Do you hear me? I say that dog's *mad*."

Hank jerked himself up so abruptly that the chair into which he was lowering his anatomy shot mysteriously from under him.

Crooked into a human interrogation point he swayed drunkenly and hit the floor with a suddenness that made the lamps rattle. With mouth agape and eyes protruding he sat there, a strange picture to behold. Franklin walked to where he was and shook an indelible pencil in his face.

"'Course you couldn't read or you'd seen that all four of them dogs was consigned to a college in Chicago to get their heads cut off. Ever' las' one of 'em was bit by a mad dog at a bench show in Berryville. I seen you pullin' your little stunt, but what could I do then—me in the depot waitin' on the daughter of the mayor. When I saw you chuck that poor little kiyoodle of hers into that cage I felt like cuttin' your throat.

"The mayor's daughter goes out on the platform an' misses it. She whistles her head off but it don't show up at all. Then she comes to me cryin' like Niagara Falls; an' at the same time I see Number Two comin' in an' I know Number Two's got to cart off four dogs. What do I do? I lie to her of course, because I got to check up my billings—an' away goes that innocent little lamb to them Chicago butchers. I ought to have kept this information to myself, but I'm too tender-hearted to see your wife an' kids get bit."

Franklin whetted his tongue for a final slashing but the words would have found no audience. Hank had scrambled to his feet and disappeared. No human legs as old as his could have taken him home faster than he went. In his mind he carried harrowing pictures.

It was dark when he reached his back yard, so he lighted his lantern and went out to where he had tied the stolen dog.

It was gone.

A feeling of despair surged through him. The lantern fell from his weak grasp and his knees collapsed like the loose joints of a folding ruler. With trembling hands he touched the flame of a match to the lantern's wick and began a timid exploration of the premises.

Once he backed into the sharp teeth of a blackberry bush. He let out a siren howl. The back yard now seemed to be ridiculously small—entirely too small, at any rate, for the accommodation of a man and a mad dog. The house reached out its arms for him to come in; it looked downcast and dejected because he was so far away. "Be it ever so humble," sang the house, with a sob in its voice and Hank submitted to its plea.

He fell down three times in his wild rush for the back door, and in his flight bore with him the terrible feeling that he was barely moving; that heavy weights were hanging to his feet; that his trousers bagged behind like an empty mailpouch and that everything in his wake was a rabid Irish setter.

In the house he found his wife and nineteen-year-old son, Rassy, at supper. Rassy looked very guilty about something and refused to meet his father's gaze.

"Listen here, you bashful pond lily," thundered the elder Fowler into Rassy's ear, "something tells me you've been into devilment."

"Why, paw," obtruded Mrs. Fowler.

"Keep your face out of it," Hank yelled at his wife. Then again addressing Rassy: "Now tell me about it. You took my dog. Now didn't yuh? Don't lie to me about it. Don't say yuh did-n-n't."

Rassy's already red face turned crimson and he yanked a mouthful of coffee from his cup as if it had been nailed down. Then he turned a grin on his sire, a grin that seldom left his face—that stamped him on sight as a youth whose mentality needed a receiver. He said nothing.

Hank doubled his fists and brandished them angrily over his head.

"Stole my dog, did yuh?" he snarled. "Stole like an ordinary thief after all I've tried to teach yuh. Stole from the hand that feeds yuh."

He swung his fists and fought for words a moment; then yelled—"What did yuh do with it?"

There was a brief silence, broken only by the jingle and click of feasting. Rassy replied though, at last, as his father was preparing to box his jaws.

"I give it to Miss Gertrude, paw." He upended his perennial grin, let it down again and ripped off a yard of coffee.

"Give it to Miss Gertrude? Miss Gertrude who?" cried Hank excitedly.

"Miss Gertrude Hawkins, the mayor's daughter, paw. You know, paw, she lost her dog today—you want to be chief of police and I—I'm a regular cat after the girls." He laughed in every key on the piano, stopping all at once to slip his grin back into its usual place.

"You young hind foot of an imp—didn't you know that dog was mad?" Hank howled.

The biscuit Rassy was attempting to bite, without the cooperation of either hand, fell into his plate badly mutilated. Distortions belonging to the face of a person who has tasted something bitter and sickening played upon his countenance. Hank's wrath was at such crescendo he could say nothing more for the time being. He paced back and forth restlessly, sat down, got up and paced again. Without warning he grabbed Rassy by the ear.

"There's just one thing on the program for you. I want you to get me, too. You are to lope over to the mayor's house and fetch that dog back. Now quit pattin' me on the arm and stop that fool grinnin'."

"Aw, paw," whined Rassy, "I don't want to fetch no mad dog. What would you do if I'd get bit an' die."

"Ain't no such luck. Besides mad dogs have quit bein' public-spirited. You heard what I said about goin' over to the mayor's didn't yuh? Well, it still stands just like that. You're goin'. See."

Rasy's poor mind worked heroically to produce a worthy argument. His next plea was one of desperation.

"Paw, I'm figurin' on askin' Miss Gertrude to marry me some day. You think she'd want to marry a feller that's give her a dog an' then——"

"Marry? You got about as much use for a wife as a hog has for a silk kimono and nose-glasses. You go get that dog."

"But Hanky, dear, what do you suppose the mayor would say if he knowed Rassy give Gertrude a mad dog?" ventured Mrs. Fowler. "Rassy ain't bright, like you, in explainin' things."

Hank went down for the count of nine.

"Yes, paw, an' how would you get to be chief of police?" Rassy quickly followed up.

Hank went down and out. After long reflection he said:

"This young hoodlum is always gettin' me into trouble, honest and upright as I try to be. Here I brung a mad dog home to kill it—but what good will it do to try explanations on the mayor." He pondered once more. "You know what? We've got to go over there an' steal that dog back. We've both got to go, me for the brains and you 'cause you can't get out of it."

RASSY felt relieved that he was not ordered to make this pilgrimage without assistance and was the less worried of the two when they sallied forth. As they left home Hank stopped only long enough to tie Sneezer to his kennel.

Soon they were slipping stealthily down the shadow of the mayor's back fence. They crept across the sod, opposite the kitchen, and for a few moments lay flat under the grape arbor. Rassy's asthmatic breathing rasped on Hank's nerves. To suppress the nuisance Hank drove the side of his hand against the offender's ribs.

A minute after that Rassy forgot himself and blew his nose lustily. A man riding by on a horse drew up in the middle of the street and peered toward them.

Hank waited until he drove on and again smote his son. Whereupon the youth emitted a loud grunt that immunized him against further attacks through Hank's fear that they would arouse the house.

"Cut out them noises; this ain't no serenade," hissed the elder Fowler. "A feller couldn't sneak up on a brass band with you along."

He scowled through the darkness at the black building before them. There was no light in the dining-room and Hank concluded that supper was over. So much the better. The members of the family probably would be on the front porch or in the living-room. He knew their habits.

There was a light in the servant's house occupied by Zeke Knot, the mayor's hired man. This gave Hank an idea. Zeke was a personal friend and could be depended upon for assistance. Furthermore he possessed the invaluable faculty of knowing how to keep his lips sealed. Followed by his stumbling, wheezing progeny he stole towards Zeke's apartment.

Through the window he saw the lean hired man sitting on the edge of the bed, with his trousers on back side before, sewing a patch over a yawning gap in the seat. Zeke was a genius on short routes and conveniences.

There was a tap on the window and Zeke sprang to his feet. To Hank he seemed to be a contortionist who was both coming and going. The coming section of him revealed a very startled face; the going part, a needle dangling at the end of a piece of white thread and an exhibit of patches similar to a crazy quilt in design and color. The hired man fastened his belt against his spinal column and threw open the door.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said with relief, when he saw Hank and Rassy. "Come on in."

They were glad to accept the invitation. Said Hank:

"Zeke, we want you to help us out of a stew. This empty-headed young goober, here, give Gertrude a dog that we gotta get back."

Zeke shifted nervously from foot to foot. "What sort o' dorg might it have been?" he asked with a studious frown.

Hank could see that the hired man was acting a part. He decided to smoke him out.

"You know what dog I mean. It was a Irish setter an' it was mad as a drunk hyena."

"Ma—ma—mad, did you say?" cried Zeke, turning ashen.

"Madder 'en fits," Hank pelted again.

Zeke's face mirrored mental agony. He felt an attack of nausea churn in his stomach and course to the top of his head. For a moment he stood stiff and still, like a twisted scarecrow, the arms of which were flopped about by the wind, as he smelled first of one hand and then of the other.

Finally he rushed to a wash-stand and began lathering his calloused palms with tar soap, sniffing repeatedly as he washed. Over his hands next he poured kerosene, liniment, and the contents of a bottle labeled "Stomach Bitters." Zeke took his face through a similar course of fluids, concluding his mad performance by brushing his clothes until some of the patches over his stomach began to turn color.

"What did you do with the perp, Zeke?" Hank demanded suddenly.

The hired man's Adam's apple jumped up and down like a rabbit in a well. He gulped painfully, then replied:

"You know I'm as honest as the day is long gen'lmen. But this afternoon I see that dorg on the back porch an' two minutes after that Preacher Wright says he certainly would like to have a dorg. I owes him for marryin' me to my ol' woman 'fore she died twelve year ago, an' I says now is my chanst to pay an honest debt. 'It's stealin,' I says to myself at first. Then I says, 'No, it ain't stealin' 'cause the dog goes to a preacher. It's fer a good cause.'

"When my conscience has cleared up enough I gets the dorg an' carries it over to Preacher Wright's just like it was a baby. It lays its head on my shoulder as affectionate as my ol' woman did the minute after her demise, an' I says to Preacher Wright—'Preacher Wright, here is certainly the kindest-hearted dorg I ever see in all my life.' 'Ezekiel,' says Preacher Wright, 'I jes' don't know how to thank you fer this fine gift. I always did love a dorg with a good disposition. You needn't worry any more about that little debt you owe me.' So Preacher Wright took the dorg in his arms an' carried it in the house awful tender-like."

Hank interrupted.

"Zeke, between you an' this grinnin' gorilla I brung with me there's been a mighty jamboree of things. What we gotta do now to get you out of trouble is to steal that dog back. We gotta go over to Preacher Wright's at once."

They went.

In an alley back of the minister's home Hank, Zeke and Rassy halted for conference. Then Zeke stole towards the kitchen and pressed his face against the window. He rushed back to his companions waving his arms excitedly.

"It's in the kitchen tied to somethin'. I heared it poundin' its tail," he reported.

Before any one in the party could understand how it had been done, the three were in the kitchen and the door through which they had entered was closed.

And here Hank was brought face to face with a fatal oversight. He had neglected to specify who was to lead out the dog. It was too late to give orders as conversation now might prove hazardous. He grated his fingers against his bristly jaws and reflected.

Rassy's wheezy breathing sang into his ears like a chorus of hungry mosquitoes that lacked a director. Hank was about to give him an admonitory punch in the ribs, but his fist was stayed by a happy idea. He placed a persuasive hand against the young man's shoulder and pushed him gently toward the table.

Rassy next felt his father's cruel fingers tightening about his neck and a paternal knee knocking coaxingly against his stomach. It was natural under such circumstances for him to bend over; and in bending over it was natural for his long arms to swing back and forth near the floor, like drunken pendulums, as he tried to grab something for support.

"Untie that dog and be quick," Hank hissed into Rassy's face.

The youth's wandering hands came in contact with a slick, lolling tongue; and vicious teeth, penetrating only the atmosphere, were heard to click together.

A scream disturbed the peaceful quiet of the minister's home. It was a scream that began in the blood-freezing wail of a panther and wound up in a donkey staccato. Rassy rushed panicky for the door, colliding with Zeke so violently the suggestion of another scream leaped from his spent lungs.

Hank bethought himself of flight but by sad accident opened the door of the pantry and rammed his head into a shelf of canned fruit. There was a crash and the sound of shattering glass.

Footsteps clattered in the front part of the house. A door swung open, there was a click and the room was bathed in light. Preacher Wright, white-faced, but with the glint of battle in his eyes, stood against the wall as if trying to decide where to begin the onslaught.

Behind him was his more frightened wife who voicelessly gaped for help. Behind the woman, prepared to be the first one out if trouble were encountered, was Squire Skeller, the corporation magistrate.

Seeing a tangle of legs and arms in the middle of the floor and a single pair of legs waving Boy Scout signs at him from the pantry entrance, Preacher Wright leaped to a cupboard and armed himself with a butcher-knife. Mrs. Wright picked up a crum-tray and Squire Skeller took several steps backward in the direction of more hallowed precincts.

All at once the tangle of legs in the middle of the floor began on a new series of gyrations. Zeke's feet described several circles over Rassy's head, his heels hit the floor noisily and he stood up. Rassy rose to his knees, blinked and grinned his eternal grin. The legs in the pantry entrance also executed more strange maneuvers—Hank presently rising to his feet and staring strangely at the minister.

Preacher Wright recognized the intruders and in his most sonorous voice demanded:

"What are you doing in my house?"

Had this been an instance of ordinary burglary no answer to his question could have been satisfactory. As it was, however, Hank uttered one magic sentence which forever settled the necessity of further explanation.

"That dog is mad," he proclaimed in booming tones.

There was a stampede for the dining-room but Squire Skeller alone reached that refuge. As he rushed from the kitchen he slammed the door behind him, leaving the minister and his hysterical mate huddled despairingly against the other side of an impossible barrier.

Preacher Wright looked about for another avenue of escape and his eyes fell upon the dog. A queer expression sprang into his face and he lowered his wife into a chair.

He picked up a broom and gingerly approached the setter. He prodded it in the middle of the ribs, jumped back and watched for results. The dog had not moved. It lay in the deep shadow of the table as if sound asleep.

The broom was given another thrust, and then another. Still no response. Preacher Wright next grew very bold and kicked the brute against its back. Again he kicked. Then he rolled it over. It turned stiffly. The setter was dead.

While a curious group was bending over the corpse, after it had been dragged out into the light, something whispered to Hank that this was the psychological moment to depart. Accordingly he slipped quietly away. In the street he met Franklin, the depot agent.

"I was just goin' to run by an' tell you that the dog was dead," said Hank.

"Huh, didn't I know it?" snorted Franklin. "I'm the fellow who sent Chief Barton down to your house to kill it."

Hank staggered back.

"You did *what*?" he stammered.

"Barton killed him with one shot," continued Franklin, jubilantly. "The dog stuck his head out of the kennel to see who was come to see him an'—blooey—it was all over. Finest pointer he ever seen, too, Ol' Barton told me."

Hank's jaw sagged. That "finest pointer" he had raised from puppyhood.

Franklin turned to go, then wheeled abruptly.

"By the way, what was all that racket I heard at Preacher Wright's?"

For private reasons Hank could not tell the truth.

"It was a baptisin'," he replied in a soft, reverential voice.

LAND OF ADVENTURE

by ROBERT E. PINKERTON

IT ISN'T always a forest trail
That leads to adventure's shrine;
It isn't always a schooner's sail
That makes glad hazard thine.

It isn't always the snowshoe path,
Nor even the saddle's creak;
It isn't always the blizzard's wrath
That marks the land you seek.

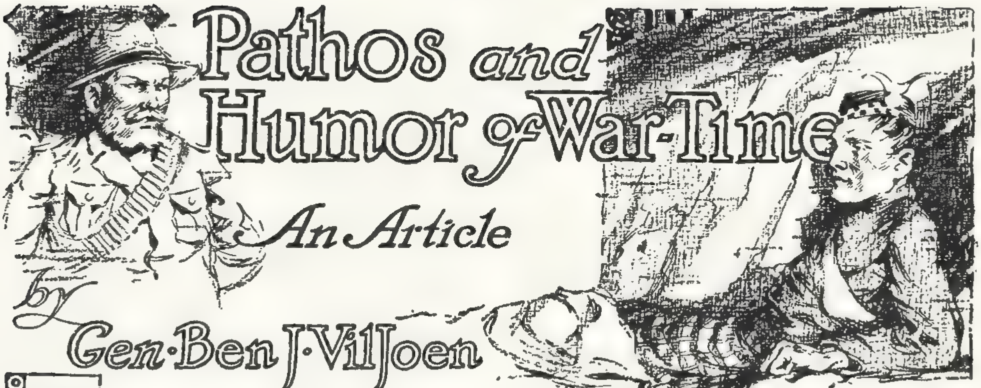
Adventure comes to the man whose thrills
Are found in the things he knows;
Be it court-room, shop, the smoke-grimed mills,
Or where a world's food grows.

It comes to the man who takes a chance
On the market's sudden burst;
To the one who from the stars' pale dance
Picks unknown comets first.

To the one who fights in a white-walled room
With knives and an ether cone;
To the one who seeks in a test-tube's gloom
A wisdom all his own.

Land of adventure is what we find
When we reach the land we would;
For each of us it's another kind,
Yet each will find it good.

Adventure doesn't know where or when,
It never is far or rare;
It's a spirit in the hearts of men
Who find it everywhere.



Pathos and Humor of War-Time

An Article

by

Gen. Ben J. Viljoen

Author of "The Story of a Piebald Horse."

WAR INVOLVES the destiny of nations. It is the supreme effort of race against race. Yet it has its humorous as well as its pathetic side, and we, who have been soldiers, remember many a grim laugh that slipped into our lives during days of fighting and digging and cooking.

Let's stir up the fire and I'll tell you a few stories of my experiences during those crimson years that closed the last century, when Briton struggled to conquer Boer.

A SURPRISED HIGHLANDER

THE battle of Elandslaagte was raging. We had just hurled back the desperate charge of a Highland brigade which had carried a score of determined Scotchmen straight through our thin, smoke-wreathed line, only to be shot down among my men.

One Highlander sergeant fell near my side, both legs shattered by a close-range rifle-shot. As I pushed through those of my command who had gathered 'round him, he cried:

"Oh mon! Oh mon! Before ye kill me take this picture to me dear old mother in Glasgie."

He pulled a little photograph from his pocket and thrust it toward me, then rambled on with his entreaties, wringing his hands in terror.

I tried in vain to calm him. The doctor arrived and began to dress his wounds. Gradually the huge sergeant grasped the meaning of my words, which I had spoken in English, as he watched the doctor giving first aid to his wounds.

At last, after an opiate had relieved his pain, the Scotchman's eyes, round with wonder, moved from one to another of the circle around him, till they rested on me.

"For the love o' Mike, brother," he gasped, "tell me, where are the Boers?"

"You are in their hands now," I answered him. "We are the Boers!"

A sickly smile played over his white face.

"Aw, don't kid a feller," he retorted hoarsely. "You ain't Boers—Boers has got long arms like apes, and short legs, and they murder prisoners—I know it. They told me so, back 'ome."

But he lived, for all his apprehensions. And I trust his ideas of the Boers changed during his stay with us.

THE KOP THAT WAS NOT TAKEN

SPION KOP was believed by General Buller to be of vital importance. "Lookout Peak," as it was called in English, commanded the Tugela river-valley and was a source of constant trouble for the force striving to drive a wedge through our lines and relieve the besieged British garrison at Ladysmith.

Buller decided to carry the kop at any cost, so selected for the job veteran Sir Charles Warren, against whom we had fought in the early eighties.

For three days the British troops wormed their way toward our strong position along the ridge. Their artillery hurled a perfect storm of shells into our trenches to tear open a way for the final charge. Then came the assault. It failed, and our men drove back the enemy with a strong counter-attack, sweeping them from their temporary cover like an avalanche.

But Warren was of the stuff that is not thus easily beaten. His artillery went at it again, more determined than before. Our ranks were thinning. We had few reenforcements to fill the gaps torn by the British cannon.

Again, the following day, Warren drove his men to the attack. Covered by a withering fire, they came at us in long, dark waves that rose and fell as rank after rank would charge across open places, then drop behind temporary cover.

By dusk the British neared the summit. The contending forces were face to face, barely sixty yards apart. Their losses must have been terrible, but ours were even more staggering to our cause, for we could not replace our fallen men.

One more charge and they would carry our trenches. It was dusk. We waited for their final attempt, determined to hold till the last man, for loss of Spion Kop meant defeat, and the relief of Ladysmith.

Suddenly, darkness having fallen, General Botha, our commander, ordered our retreat, leaving me with but a light cavalry contingent to harass the enemy's advance.

All night we lay waiting for dawn which would bring their final rush—and the end. Slowly the first tinted fingers of an African sunrise rose over the distant hills. It grew lighter. We tensed forward, rifles ready, eyes straining for the enemy's first break toward us from cover.

But that last British charge never came. From a battle-field, the gray slopes of Spion Kop had changed to a vast burying-ground. Hundreds of red-cross men were gathering in the wounded and laying them in freshly dug trenches—the soldier's last resting-place. And far out across the Tugela long strings of wagons and columns of weary men struggled southward along misty river roads. Warren had given up, was in full retreat.

We turned our eyes to the north. Far out across the other valley, General Botha's command could just be discerned, disappearing through a narrow mountain pass.

Separated by the range of hills, neither leader knew the other had run away, nor can I tell to this day General Warren's reason for abandoning Spion Kop after the great sacrifice he had made to almost gain its crest.

So, on that dewy, sun-sprinkled morning, English red-cross and Boer cavalry shook hands across the battle-field and buried their noble dead side by side. And Spion Kop was left alone to its winds and its rains and its memories.

AULD LANG SYNE

ALONG the convoy line from the railway terminus at Machadodorps to Lydenburg stretched a chain of heavily fortified positions, held by the British. If we were to advance we must break through this line, and I chose Helvetia as the point for attack.

It was New Year's Eve, 1900. I knew the garrison would be celebrating the dawning year, since Helvetia was the last point where an assault would be expected.

As we planned, the garrison was taken by surprise. We carried two outer forts at 2:30 A. M., and the colonel commanding was wounded by our first volley.

For a moment we paused, fearing a trap. Then, the enemy's resistance being absurdly weak, we rushed the inner fortifications and Helvetia was ours, with its garrison of nearly seven hundred men.

It was imperative that we get our prisoners and booty away at once, for intercepted messages told of British reenforcements hurrying to the rescue. Not half an hour passed before I made ready to depart. But that half-hour was enough. The Tommies had shown my men their rum, and Boer and Britisher alike were acquiring a hilarious drunk. Like long-lost brothers they sang and danced, arms around each other's shoulders. War for them was forgotten.

I ordered the rum destroyed, thinking I could save at least part of my command. But instead of pouring it on the ground, the crafty troops filled their water-bottles to overflowing with the liquor.

At last I became impatient and ordered the retirement of my men, regardless of preparation. Arm in arm with their prisoners, the Boer line zigzagged off across the hills. No time for roll-call. I could not even get a rough estimate of those who made up that rollicking New Year's cavalcade.

And as we marched away there still remained, seated in a great semicircle, a full company of Tommies, too intoxicated to walk, too heavy to carry, singing "Auld Lang Syne" to their departing comrades.

A FIGHTING PARSON

A MINISTER of the High Church clashed with the powers that ruled Rhodesia and was forced to resign his pastorate. So relentless was his powerful enemy that the good parson at last had to flee to our Boer Republic where he quickly became a citizen, devoting his talent to a Dutch weekly paper.

At this time, 1897, Magato, king of a troublesome tribe of natives, went on his periodical outbreak against Boer authority. White traders at Foutpansberg were his prey.

I was about to lead an expedition against Magato, when who should enter our recruiting-office but the parson. And, wonder of wonders, he offered his services to the Republic.

"But, my dear doctor," I remonstrated, "this campaign will be heart-breaking. We must fight over terrible ground, and the natives will show us no mercy. It is fighting to be done by the younger men."

But he would listen to no entreaties.

"I have experienced life in nearly every other sphere. Now I wish to go through a campaign, to know what a soldier's life really is," he answered with an air of quiet decision.

So the parson went along. We reached the railway terminus, our military base, by easy marches. Then, striking back into the bush, we increased to man-killing speed.

It was laughable to see the good parson try to keep his horse from rolling in muddy pools, still more amusing when he would try to pick that particular steed from a dozen others, all caked from mane to fetlock with pasty African mud.

Slipping, splashing, plodding ceaselessly, we at last arrived at Magato Mountain, on which King Magato had prepared to make a stand against us. Our commander-in-chief already had arrived with another commando and headquarters had been established.

The mountain was a mass of rock and dense brush. Our plan of attack was to approach the native stronghold at the top by several columns, advancing from different sides.

I called a Scotchman, McNab, to my tent and asked him to persuade the parson not to accompany us. I knew it was to be desperate, hand-to-hand work with no quarter asked or given. Also, I feared the gruelling mountain climb would be too much for the old man.

McNab reported the parson's answer to him had been:

"My deah Misteh McNab! Of course one hates to think of leaving one's loved ones behind, but my life is heavily insured. My family is provided for and I have tasted the cup of life, its sorrows and its joys, and, to use a common camp expression, as far as I am concerned, I don't give a ——!"

And along went the Reverend.

The next morning, at dawn, we neared the Kaffir natives, who immediately opened a deadly fire. Men dropped like tenpins around me.

Seeking cover wherever possible, we advanced in short rushes. Native warriors seldom can stand in the face of a determined charge. Their tactics are of the sniping, guerrilla sort, long-range work with ample time to shoot, run, and shoot again. Knowing this we gave them no chance to reorganize at any point. Soon they were fleeing before our seasoned troops.

The battle, however, was not yet won, although Magato's stronghold was in our hands. The wily chieftain had one more card to play.

Back of the mountain a narrow, rock-shouldered pass covered the Kaffir retreat, and Magato held it with a strong rear-guard. Flushed by our success we rushed at the tiny defile, as we had stormed the Kaffir breastworks an hour before. But this time their line stood firm.

Night blotted out the pass, and we were forced to await dawn before renewing the assault.

The Kaffirs, early in the fight, had set fire to the tall rank grass on the mountain, and our camp-site that evening was a veritable pond of soot and slop. It rained, straight up and down, as it can in those African mountains, and torrents of black water and muck swept over our camp, putting out fires, messing up equipment, drenching us to our shivering skins.

It was a night of cursing. No chance for sleep; no opportunity to dry our soggy clothes; and all the while came the roar of Kaffir kettle-drums and the chant of their war-songs, which told us they were again rallying in that dingy, narrow defile, bent on some new mischief, perhaps even working themselves into such a frenzy that they might attack.

Nervously, I made the rounds of our outposts, cautioning them against surprise assaults, warning them to challenge the faintest shadow. At dawn I chanced up on the parson, and he was a sight I shall never forget.

His face was smudged with soot. His hat minded me of a great, sick cabbage-leaf. His clothes, always neat, always clean, were plastered with muck, and sagged and flapped about him like wet sails. While his trim boots seemed one solid mass of mud.

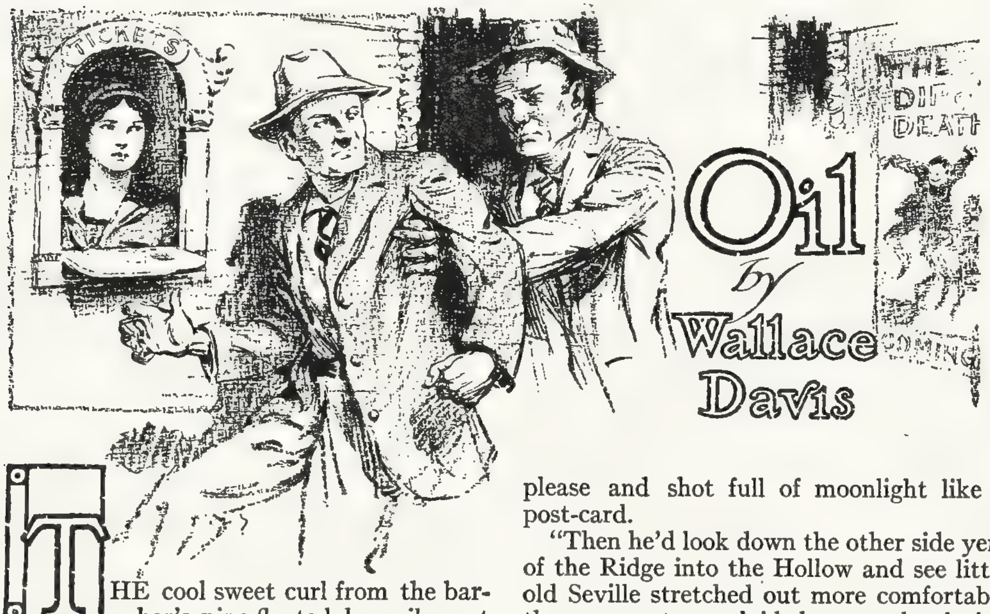
I swallowed a smile and asked, with an attempt at encouragement:

"Hello, doctor! How are you this morning?"

The parson jumped to attention, and gravely, solemnly saluted. Gone from his eyes was the flash of battle. Gone from the set of his shoulders was the military squareness. In real London English he replied:

"My deah commandant. This morning I am physically and morally a wreck. And after thinking this matter over very seriously, very thoroughly, this is my conclusion: My mother sent me into this world on a much more peaceful mission. This is not war, it is hardship."

"They are one and the same thing, dear doctor," I answered, and continued my mud-spattered rounds.



Oil

by Wallace Davis

THE cool sweet curl from the barber's pipe floated dreamily past me out of the shadow and was turned into silver under the moon. A breath of a breeze caught it, twisted it, twined it, and shredded it gently into nothing.

"Without arising," he said, "the old bahbah remarks to wit: she is *a* evening. Foot in molasses, son, a feller'd never believe that just twelve hours ago it was 106 and that it'll be that way again in another twelve. He'd just sit up here on top o' Pine Ridge on our verander and call us a liar. He'd look down yonder into the river canyon and see the 'Old Lady' prattling away to jine the brimming Pacific, looking as cool as you please and shot full of moonlight like a post-card.

"Then he'd look down the other side yere of the Ridge into the Hollow and see little old Seville stretched out more comfortable than any cat ever laid down coyly closing up bar at two instead of twelve. And then he'd sniff o' the air and say, 'Dust? Why, they ain't any! I don't get nothing but the pleasing odor o' pines.' And then like as not he'd point to the stars a-hanging like a million Chinese lanterns all over the sky and take us to task for calling this yere innocent sky a 'brazen bell-glass'—or whatever it was you called her in this week's *Sentinel.*

"'Pears to me that Seville ain't so godless as the Reverend paints her. They sure is a Providence that once in a while remembers these yere boxed up See-yerra towns. 'Pears like somebody seen us a-rocking helpless in the sea and poured a little oil around to sort o' see us through while we was catching our breath. And somehow, too, this yere evening sort o' reminds me of Tiny Tim Tobin. Ever heared tell o' him? No? He spread a little oil where it'd do a lot of good—in a woman's heart."

TOBIN he came into the Hollow a-hossback and, 'fore he hardly stuck his hoss into the stable, old man Gardiner of the Gas and Electric Company hires him to ride "ditch," Gar' believing that they was possibilities out along the ditch for a feller with Tobin's kind of jaw. They evidently was, 'cause we don't see him none for a couple o' weeks.

But one day he herds in a parcel of four hoboes that's been privately settling past differences with the company. And "Old Scotch" unlocks the *Sentinel* though she is in press, to drop in a line saying as Sevillians can now drink their water without straining, boiling, and filtering it.

Tobin he stays around town a day or so while the justice lacerates up the feelings of these yere four cool-prits. Court was being held two doors below the tonsorial parlors and he gets to dropping in and we kind o' gets acquainted.

He sure was a fine listener, son. The only thing he does at all while I'm talking was kill off flies with a little snaky quirt—take 'em right off your leg or a white apron and never leave no spot at all.

He wasn't no sized man when you backed him sociable-like up again' a wall and took his measure. But he was broad and he was deep, and when you looked at him a-riding his hoss, he sizes up better than toler'ble a whole lot. He sort o' added the hoss to himself so's you thought of 'em sort o' as one.

Well, when we gets over being excited about our drinking water, Summer comes a-hitting in. Sid Tuttle, the butcher, takes to making smoky ice and charging three cents a pound for it and the Opera House gets to running full blast—three evenings a week.

Sid Tuttle would begin telling you all kinds o' lies to account for the amount of ammonia you had to drink when you bucked your iced tea. But Miss Maudie Brown, if you asked her if the pictures was fit for chil'ren to look at, she would tell you the truth. If you wanted to risk it, she'd take your money across the little glass-topped shelf that stuck out from the wall. If you didn't, she wouldn't short change you next time you did attend.

Le' me tell you, every young feller that hit this yere incorporated city lit on his knees—they fell for her that quick. And she wasn't such a beauty either. She was one of them inside-sweet women that makes you ashamed of the kindest thing you ever did. That kind seems to create the most miserable and most violent love of 'em all.

Mebbe because he was the most miserable of 'em all and therefore most appealing to her mothering nature, Joe Hunter soon had Miss Maudie as his private property. He gave up everything but loafing and liquor for her. When he got going steady at blacksmithing and could do without his two-score drinks per diem, it was to be hey-day and wedding-bells.

The first evening that Timothy Tobin attended the movies he never saw a thing —'cept mebbe the vision of a pair of eyes that seemed to foller him, a-looking for the man in him. The next night there wasn't no show and he steps around casual to the tonsorial parlors, before which Friend Petie and I is sitting a-serenading up the atmosphere.

"You've had my life in your hands every other day for some time, bahbah, and you never slit my throat yet that I knows of," he says. "So, seeing we're toler'ble friends, mebbe you can tell me who it is that——"

"Hm-m-m!" I says, 'cause a bahbah gets a touch o' confidence from a stranger quicker than a seismograph dopes out a trembler. "Miss Maudie Brown—to be Hunter," I says, and Friend Petie does a chord on his guitar to cover his surprise.

"H-m-m!" says Tobin to himself, and then goes on casual-like, "Who is it that busts bottles over by the tie-rail where decent animals can get all cut up on 'em?"

"I don' know," I says easy and off-hand, "and neither does Link Lincoln, the feller that has the aut-mob'le. And le' me tell you, if you're planning on going gunning for the bottle-buster, you'll have to fight Bro. Lincoln for hunting privileges. He counts the pleasure all hisn."

"My Hector hoss has a nasty leg," he says sort o' offhand and goes a-walking off to the tune of "Honey Boy" which Friend Petie declares to be fitting and proper, 'cause she sure would hate to see him leaving and we'd know her heart was grieving 'cause the proprieties wouldn't let her mother as many as her heart could hold.

"How's that Hector hoss's leg?" I says to him the next evening when he comes in from doing his little thirty mile and asks for a good close shave and a line-up.

"Oh, I throws some stuff into it and she's done healed—and it wasn't so bad as I thought."

Somehow I has a misgiving that the private property idee don't seem to excite Tim Tobin's respec' overly—and you can't blame him for not believing it after seeing Joe Hunter of a Satu'day evening all illuminated up.

Well, he takes to buying too many tickets and a-hunting around for his money. And then he gets to saying, "Good evening, ma'm." And finally he brings her up a glass of ice' tea from the hotel bar; which she accepts and asks his name. And right there a few of the crass residents of this yere incorporated city announces that they possesses even money which is waiting for circulation on Mr. Tobin. Son, in ten days they was giving odds.

SOMEHOW a shaft permeates the Hunter brain and he gets it that something is in the air; and he saunters around to see that his Maudie is all safe and sane. Mr. Tobin stands free and easy talking to Miss Maudie, and Mr. Hunter he takes Mr. Tobin under the arms from behind and gently lifts him aside—yes, gently lifts him aside like it weren't safe for such a big strong feller to handle him any other way. And thereupon Big Joe leans his massive elbow on the window-sill and smiles at Tobin.

Timothy he smiles back—not a good-natured smile at all. It's the kind of a smile a feller rasps onto his face when he knows he can beat another man before he ever starts a-trying.

"Some day I'll bust you, sport," says Hunter. "This ain't no hangout, but a ticket office."

"Any day'll just suit me," says Tobin, laying the emphasis where it'd hurt most.

But Miss Maudie nods to him and begins saying something to Hunter—and Tobin has sense enough and courage enough to beat it.

Well, it wasn't but a day or two later that Big Joe was deeper in his cups than a feller'd think he could go in this yere country without striking water. He was one of these yere fool self-pitiers when he got awash.

Maudie had given him the word to stay away, he says, and she'd sure broke his heart. That was the burden and refrain of it. I reckon he'd sayed it about forty-'leven diff'ent ways a-getting more pitying every time before Tobin walks in.

Tim he don't say nothing. He just listens a minute and then walks over and jabs Big Joe Hunter under the jaw as cool as you like and turns his back and walks out without even waiting to see whether he was killed or just maimed for life.

"I heared Joe's going gunning," says I the next morning shaving him, 'cause I sort o' liked the boy.

"It's about his size," he says, "to shoot up a feller that could walk under his arm. I heared it too, bahbah—and thank 'e."

They was some of the boys sitting in the shop and that saying of his sort o' gave him the name of Tiny Tim. 'Course, nobody called him that a-tall. It would have been bad form, just like you don't call Constable May "Lick-spittle." It's more of a description so to speak.

Fred Hall says they never had better houses over to the Opera House. But I don't know whether you'd call 'em houses or not. You see, the fellers with money on Tobin they attends regular—that is, they buys a dozen tickets apiece and comes stampeding out for a smoke every time somebody comes up the stairs; then buying their way in again after a couple o' puffs so as to leave their man alone with opportunity. But nothing sanguine happens.

However, the odds gets longer, 'cause night after night when the Opera House is having a show, Tiny Tim stands by the cage and talks sociable, taking Miss Maudie home afterwards sort o' round-about. And the nights that they wasn't any show, he sits on the porch in a squeaky chair talking sociable.

Now, old Bill Summers seen how things was going. They was going from bad to worse. He ain't noted for a soft heart; but his pocket-book's uncommon tender. He privately picks up a few more long shots and then offers Joe a job blacksmithing if he'll stay sober, old Summers owning the stable and the blacksmith shop then.

Neither old Bill nor anybody thinks Joe has a chance o' staying sober; but the odds shortens a little over the fact that mebbe Miss Maudie'll sort o' jump into it. And old Bill, to cover his cash thoroughly, tells Maudie that he's done made the offer and there it is for to be took or left—he walking over in the heat of the day specially to prove his sincerity.

And that night Miss Maudie, it being a home night, tells something to Tim.

"Tim," she says, "I can't understand why I ain't ever had to tell you before—why it didn't sort o' cry out all of itself. Tim, I'm just a-drawing your heart out of you, just a-drawing you along, Tim. I can't marry you, for all you're being the fine man that you are. I can't, Tim. I'm sorry, it was just selfishness, Tim, and not what you thought it was. I was—I was trying to make a man of Joe Hunter. I was thinking he'd want me more, Tim—mebbe even only the body of me; I was thinking he'd try harder if he thought you was going to get it. Tim! Listen, Tim! Don't hate me—try to keep on loving me. Ain't I naked enough already; ain't I near to dying with shame, with you only finding out how I been handling you and without you hating me?"

"Maudie," he says, with his voice all tied up in a knot, but a kind of a gentle way to it anyhow.

"Tim—Tim," she says, "I want you to help me just once more—just a little longer. I want you to kiss me. It's not—not pretending. I want you to kiss me and mebbe—mebbe it'll mean good-by. Mr. Hunter is across the street in the shadow of Brooks' pine and I want him to see. I told him he could come tonight, but first I want him to see."

So Tim he stops squeaking the chair and kisses her. And while they was doing it, they were standing in front of the open door and there was a lamp a-sitting on the living-room table—which made a picture for Joe Hunter.

When Tim left, Big Joe Hunter comes rampsing over to Miss Maudie's.

"Good evening," he says sharpish.

"Oh, Mr. Hunter!" she says, quite like she was impersonally delighted to see him.

"Maudie?" he whines. "Maudie?"

"Well?" she says cool as can be.

But Big Joe Hunter didn't say a thing; he just slumped down on to the steps and sat a long time, blowing his nose right frequent. Somehow a feller just crying inside thataway fetches the heart right up out of a woman. And son, poor little Maudie who never had her heart hid away from him, just a-dying to mother him, poor little Maudie she swallers her heart and goes on a-follering her program.

"Well," she says, "I can't marry no drunkard."

"Maudie?" he pleads, and he seems kind o' taken back.

"Well, you're purty near—purty near," she softened. "But you can't keep me on nothing, Joe Hunter—and, besides, I won't be kept on nothing."

"Old Bill Summers—" he begins.

"I know. I know," she says kind o' weary, likes he has been a long time getting there but mebbe she can rest in a minute.

"Maudie, I need you for to help me make it go. I just can't go no further without somebody sort o' herding me where a feller ought to go. Somewhere I've got complete off the trail and the way-marks is gone. But, Maudie, if I had somebody to show me where to head in at, if I once tapped the trail, I'd stick, Maudie. You and me both know it. Maudie—Maudie?"

But Maudie just stood there looking down on him. Son, don't you never go thinking a woman is playing you on a string—a good woman—till you sort o' think over the bet she's a-taking. She's a-jumping in the dark mostly and a feller ain't got no right to shove.

"Maudie?" he says after a while. And then after another long while, he says, "Just a *chance*, Maudie!"

And then Maudie says—

"Now, Joe, listen yere——"

O' course he promised and of course he meant it as far as that kind of a feller can mean anything, while the going was good and smooth and easy; a sort of an instantaneous meaner, exactly like whoever he was with.

Along about midnight he come down to Rick's and starts the news in circulation: he takes Bill Summers's job and the cake, the cake being of the wedding variety. It circulated; it wasn't no time 'fore every bar in town was having lucky man drinks, the lucky man being hurried from door to door, and the bets deposited with the bartenders being immediately cashed and devoted to gleeing up the evening.

IT WAS in the Old Oaken Bucket that the two met up.

"Hello, Tiny Tim Tobin, my dear," says Hunter, leaning heavy against the bar.

"Meaning me?" asks Tim after an uneasy pause while he scratches the old setter that comes nozzling his hand.

"Pre-zactly that!" agrees Hunter grandly.

"Hello," says Tim, low and uninterested-like, as though the social amenities had been consider'bly mauled thereby.

"Heard the news, young feller?" Hunter jibed.

"I didn't believe it."

"Oh—and so you went to see," says Hunter, holding his hand over his face polite-like while he smiled.

"I heared that you was through with booze and come to see. Yep, I just drops in to see, 'cause I didn't believe it—and you *ain't?*"

This yere incorporated city don't stand for gun work at all. A whole lot o' the fighting never gets further along than lip-lashing. Course, the Eyetalians they cuts each other up and beats it and the city's glad to get shet of 'em. But the reg'lars takes it out in politics or, if they're uncommon young, they resports to the corral of Boston Eddie.

Now, for a fact, ain't there always some darn fool as will laugh at a crack like just broke? Well, Joe Hunter looks at the hilarious feller and then he looks at Tim. The thing began to creep into his mind: he had been misunderstood. He had meant—but never mind what he had meant; it was too late now, he thought. Now instead of being the rider, he was the goat. He had quit liquor, yet here he was walking like a sailor ashore.

And another thing came to him. He remembered the silhouette. She had kissed Tobin that same evening. And he, he, Joe Hunter, had had to *beg* for a chance, a big chance, the last. And here it was already blackened. And she would even have married him on faith—and here was Tobin laughing at him. It hurt; it was true. And he kept seeing that —— silhouette a-hanging before his eyes. He lets his hand wander down to his hip; he wouldn't see that silhouette enacted again, 'cause Tobin was going to leave for somewheres sudden—and he hoped it wasn't heaven. Maudie was hisn; and to —— with Tobin.

The room behind Tim sort o' begins to clear. One feller steps over for a piece o' pickle and another drifts over to see how some checkers was coming out over at a table in a corner; and so on. But Tim he just pets the dog right into eternity it seems, 'cause the hand comes a-wabbling back from Joe's hip and it has what it went for.

Then, that quick, Tobin he snaps out that funny little quirt he used to shoot flies with and she lashes out like a snake and the supple end wraps around Hunter's wrist. He gives her a jerk one way and the gun twists out of Joe's fingers and then he jerks her another way and she unwraps slick as you please.

"I heared you quit drinking," he says, "and I see you ain't. I'm a-leaving this yere Seville this evening. In six months I'll be back and I don't want for to see that you still *ain't* quit. Gus," he says to the 'keeper, "let him shoot me in the back if he wants to. So long, boys." And with that and a pat for the dog he walks out and away.

JUST six months later, which is Winter before last, a feller saunters into the parlors and asks, says he—

"Can you give an *hombre* a shave," he says, "and cut 'em three days under the skin?"

"I can," I says, "but in the Winter the boys yere mostly lets 'em grow, if you're asking me."

"This yere shave," says he, "is particularly purposeful."

And, son, it wasn't till I run the clippers over him that I realized it was Tiny Tim Tobin. He'd come in afoot and looking like a 'bo who had been fool enough to tackle the Hump too late in the year.

"Slop on the lather thick, bahbah," he says. "I ain't aiming to have this yere noised around. And tell me, bahbah," he says, "do I hear it right?"

"The Hunters?" I says sort o' shy.

"And leave out the sugar, bahbah."

"I don' know nothing much myself," I says. "But I can vouch for this yere much: Black Annie that's doing the heavy work out to the Hunters' comes into the Hollow one day all riled up and has it up and down with the constable. Whatever it is, he tells her he can't officially do nothing till somebody tells him to—and he gives her to understand that a nigger woman's observations on what she thinks she has seen or what she thinks might have happened ain't evidence.

"Well, Tim," I says, "somehow whatever it was leaks out to two or three fellers roundabouts and they gets some het up and 'lows they'll eternally pulverize the tar out o' Joe Hunter. But this yere Lick-spittle May comes a-dodging along and puts the thing to 'em sort o' different. The woman, he says, is above all to be considered—and these fellers roundabouts agrees to that. Then he says are they going to kill Hunter, and they says, not quite. Well, then, argues the constable, the big hulk, if he goes home—which he will if you-all don't plumb assassinate him—he will be uglier than ever and ain't he rotten mean enough now? And there y' are. Foot in molasses, son."

Then I shuts off sudden.

"What say?"

"A woman that'll marry a feller to make him better ain't got any head, just heart." And I jumps around to shaving his chin so he won't talk any more.

"I heared," he says, when I can't bluff any more around his chin, "I heared that Mrs. Hunter's took to drinking," he says.

"I ain't," I says. "I only hears she's been found drunk in the kitchen when Annie come in of a morning for to set her stove a-going." That there remark sort o' het me the way he says it.

"Thank 'e! Thank 'e, bahbah," he says, and I sees he was just sort o' getting my attitude, you might say.

"We all sort o' banks on you coming," I says, "and we only been hanging fire a short while."

I know he's a-wondering why we ain't told somebody where to head in at—Mr. Joe Hunter, for instance.

"Thank 'e!" he says again, and I never have knowed just how he meant that.

You ain't been here through a Christmas, son, so I'll have to tell you that the night before Christmas in Seville is tame as sterilized water. Everybody that has folks is gone Below and them that hasn't, slips down to the Bay and lives a week trying to get gregarious again. They's nobody in the Hollow much but the ditch gang and the railroad crews.

When Joe Hunter came in from out to the Celli place which they was staying on, it was night and snowing right brisk. He don't find nobody much at the Bucket which is his stamping-ground now. I reckon he puts in a lonely couple o' hours. And he puts in plenty o' liquor too.

I has Tobin up for supper yere to the cabin and he sits around easy all evening interesting as can be. He was always the most interesting listener, son, I ever see. Well, she runs along about eleven and I says, had he brought his silk pyjamers?

"No," he says, "I figure on moving along this evening."

"Hm-m-m!" I says, 'cause I feels it coming.

"Bahbah, this yere won't be no grandstanding. All I figures I'll do is just sort o' foller him."

And that's all he did.

By the road it's mebbe five miles down to the Celli ranch and two foot deep with sticky yeller 'dobe all the way. Mostly people down thataway walks the railroad right-of-way. It cuts the walk in two going to Celli's.

Now this yere right-of-way is mebbe two hundred feet wide with a double-track grade. You know the choppy mountain country—one minute tunneling, the next filling, and the next making a sixty-foot cut. Along this yere grade there's a path on either side that's fair good footing for a feller that's walking in the daytime or at night, if he's sober.

For Joe Hunter to tackle one of these paths more than half drunk and under six inches of snow, would be suicide, and to walk inside the tracks along the ties would be inviting a million falls. Now along the bob-wire fence on each side of this two-hundred-foot cleared right-of-way is a path which the feller has made that walks the fence and repairs 'em for the railroad.

Well, Joe Hunter he chooses the path on the up-hill side of the right-of-way, it being a little more regular in formation and not so jaggedy with ravines, they being smaller higher up.

Joe he's forgot his lantern and left her in town and Tim he leaves his unlit and just follers. They's consider'ble snow in the air and it ain't no night at all for a jaunt. But Big Joe he makes fair to middling time and purty soon passes half way.

Then Tim he coughs. Hunter whips around and says—

"Howdy, sport." But Tim don't say nothing. So Hunter says again, "Howdy, man; where 'n —— is your riding lights?"

But Tim just waits in the dark and purty soon Joe he cusses consider'ble and goes on.

About a hundred yards and Tim coughs again, and Joe halloos and gets no answer and goes on cussing. And then he coughs again and when Hunter gets to damning things in bunches he walks up close.

"Tim Tobin! Tim Tobin!" he gasps when he sees him and then he leans back again' the bob-wire fence and laughs and laughs and laughs, and Tim he don't say anything. He just looks. And after a minute Joe Hunter quits laughing kind o' gurgly, like his throat's shut off all of a sudden.

"I ain't afraid o' you, you little insec'," he roars. But Tim he takes a step nearer and Hunter gives a step. "I give you warning: foller me and I'll plug you, hones' to Pete, I will."

But Tobin goes right on follering, never changing his pace unless Joe Hunter lifted or dropped his, and never saying nothing, just always a-looking. Purty soon Hunter snatches off his mitten and snaps clumsily around with his gun in his hand. But his hand wobbles when he don't notice no change in Tim—just him standing silent and looking.

"Think you got me worked, eh, little insec'? Le' me tell you something—hot lead cures phoney ghosts. And le' me tell you something more 'fore I sends you visiting your Uncle Nick. It ain't lonesome any more; *I've* reformed *her!*"

And then he looks sharp at Tobin, for Tobin never stirred when he mentioned her. His gun hand wavers weakly and his general balance ain't improving. He just didn't know whether Tim Tobin was a feller or a ghost or what, and he wasn't carrying the sand to reach out and touch him. And what if he shot and nothing happened—how would he know but what he just missed him and the lead didn't go through him at all?

"I don't have no truck with you," he says, "and you can't say I ain't warned you." And he slips the gun into his overcoat pocket and fled.

TOBIN just follered right along. Purty soon they gets to galloping and they ain't no mercy in galloping along the side o' one o' these yere ridges. And they is less mercy in galloping groggy with whisky and weak with imagination along of a bob-wire fence. O' course, he had to fall sooner or later—but they's a moutty stimulus in running from just what he was a-running from—fear. When he dropped he laid a while getting his breath and when he got it he looks at Tobin standing just beyond reach, and Tobin's silent and level-eyed.

"Why don' your whiskers grow, huh, you little insec'? You just died off recent and they ain't had no time, huh?" And he laughs wild as can be till Tim takes a step toward him and then, that quick, he's up and going.

Hunter he gets to grabbing the wire right frequent now, 'cause liquor legs is kind o' ornery things in a long run; they just won't act. But when Joe slows a trifle he always looks over his shoulder and there's Tobin right there behind him and he lets out all he has and runs, and grabs the wire and runs some more.

The fence-walker for the railroad is an Eye-talian and he says that first he would see a bit of gray yarn a-hanging on a barb and then they was one every so often and then oftener.

Purty soon, he says, the barbs was red and they got to having whole stringings of yarn and coat-wool and little shreds of flesh; and sometimes, he says, he uncovers a red splotch in the snow. This yere fence-walker gives that testimony after he comes in from his next day's walking, and nobody thinks it was anything but the evidence of a feller going it blind.

It must have been *a* race, son; yep, it must have been *a* race, 'cause he run till he run his heart out—he run till he fell on his face, dead. It was right after he had topped a stiff hump that he fell.

Well, when Hunter is gone, Tobin quit being a ghost. He began being a feller full o' purpose.

First, he takes the bottle from Hunter's pocket and tosses it out onto the tracks below. Then he puts a dollar and some small silver into Joe's pants pocket, positive proof that he wasn't drunk. And then he takes his own lantern and kicks the glass out of it.

He goes to one side and loosens the filling-cap and pours out the oil and puts the filling-cap back. You see, son, he's trying to build up a little evidence for to prove that Hunter'd lost his way in the night account of his oil giving out. And to make it a little better he steps on the lantern and twists her a little so as to show Hunter was carrying the lantern when he fell—they being some chance that some poor fool would mebbe dig up Hunter's own lantern which he left somewheres in town. Well, Tim slips the handle of the lantern along Joe's arm and goes off to get Black Annie at the Celli place to help tote him home.

It ain't but a short walk to the ranch house; and when he knocks Miss Maudie opens the door herself.

"Oh!" she says, staring queer at him.

"Evening, ma'm," he says, just like he was the hired man or something. "I was happening along sort o' and I runs across him."

"Joe?" she gasps. "You run across Joe?"

"Yes, 'm," he says. And then the negress moves toward the door for to see who it was and he says, "You, Annie, you fetch a folding cot and come along with me."

Maudie she gives a little groan and comes tearing out into the snow where it has sort o' drifted up against the steps.

"They ain't any need o' hurrying much, ma'm," he says, just like he was saying "sweetheart" or something thataway. "You better stick yere, ma'm: Annie and me'll fetch him in no time."

"Tim!" she says and he looks at the light so she can see he ain't lying when he answers what's a-crying to be answered.

"No, ma'm, it ain't nothing awful at all. It was just that his oil give out—even the best o' fellers will sometimes get turned hind end across and get lost, ma'm, and——"

"Oh, God!" she says and keeps saying it half crying and half laughing sort o'. "Thank God, it was oil—no oil! And not —not whisky!"

And when they left she was a-sitting in a chair a-crying herself to pieces, which was better than leaving her just staring with dry eyes at nothing.

"See yere, Annie," he says when he gets out through the gate leading from the Celli place into the right-of-way, "what's this yere woman drinking for?"

"For to keep—for to keep him from abusing her now, suh," she says.

"Now?"

"She can't take no abusing now."

"What's the diff'ence between then and now, eh?" he says, 'cause Annie ain't talking for any account at all.

"A heap, suh; a heap," she says, as though the wild horses the feller tells about would tick off another failure a-trying to tear any more out o' her. But in about fifty yards the dark or something—mebbe the quiet—sort o' pulls a plug somewheres and all the dammed-up bitterness comes a-gushing.

"Gollamighty, Mistuh Tobin," she busts out, "ain't I found this yere Miss Maudie after one o' these yere drinking nights a-laying 'most anywheres? And ain't I tucked her into bed and ain't I every lastest time wondered when you-all ever was a-coming anyway? Yes, suh.

"And 'long about noon he wakes up and sees her all 'draggled and frowsy-looking and he sits down beside her and cries and goes on awful, a-getting on his knees and promising everything that comes into his mind. And she says, 'Poo' little boy.' Yes, suh, Mistuh Tobin, she says that and that he won't never do it any more. Not a drap, she says, 'cause they just can't 'low it now.

"And then, Mistuh Tobin, mebbe he don't touch no drap for a week. And when I says, 'You-all better let me strangle this yere wuthless man,' she says back at me, 'Go on back to you' work, you Black Annie.' And then I says, 'Yes, 'm.' And she says, 'Mebbe it's better that I can't run any more, 'cause when I touches it myself he always hates liquor more 'an ever in the morning.' And I says, 'They never was any feller didn't hate it in the *morning*.' Gollamighty, I stands it just so long, Mistuh Tobin, and then I traipses right up town to that wuthless constable. 'Do something,' I says. And he says—and he says—and he—and he——"

"Yep, Annie, this yere's him. You see, no oil and no booze."

Black Annie gasped, her eyes showing white in the pale light o' the lantern.

"You pos'tive, Mistuh Tobin; you done pos'tive? Just roll back his coat-tail. If Miss Maudie'd find a bottle riding home *now*, Mistuh Tobin, suh, it'd plumb kill her dead."

"I a'ready looked. He's even got some money."

"Gollamighty!"

And so they takes Big Joe Hunter home to his wife.

Tobin he didn't stay none. He come in for to tell Doc' Butler all this yere evidence he has fixed up about Joe getting lost. But while he was coming in, he didn't exactly come straight. He makes a lot o' footprints of a feller losing his way account of getting his directions crisscrossed. And o' course, at one place he lights nigh half a box o' matches, like as this yere was the place where the oil give out.

Well, after he tells the doc' what he pleases, he comes up here and tells me how's how. He spends Christmas with me and tells all his fixed-up evidence again to Constable May, and old May he 'lows this, that, and the other thing and then goes home and does his duty to the festal dinner. And the next day Tiny Tim Tobin he leaves and I never seen him since.

But Mrs. Hunter she holds the baby up to me only the other day and says—

"Ain't he growing big, just like his——"

And then she sort o' stops. "O' course," she goes on, "he ain't old enough yet quite to understand how his daddy gets lost in the snow Christmas Eve a-fighting his way home in the dark to his mommy."

"No, 'm," I says; "no, 'm, I reckon he ain't."

And off she goes, trotting along as happy as ever you see.

"BUT, bahbah," I argued, "where does Tim gain?"

"Foot in molasses, son," he gasped. "You don't think he *lost* anything, do you? Well, son, that goes to show that you don't know a solitary thing about love when she's spelled with a capital. What you call sacrifice, he like as not just call 'helping Miss Maudie.' "

The old barber knocked the ashes from his pipe and arose to go in.

"Loss! You just ain't got the viewpoint. He loved her the first time he saw her—he loves her now. He's happy to give and give some more, for with giving the love in him grows.

"Yes, siree, Timothy Tobin's love has grown considerable, because, son, it took a man's size love to drop a little oil in a wondering woman's heart, thataway, a-calming and a-clearing up an ideal."

Memory Miles

by Berthe K. Mellett

WINTER hurled its icy cudgel straight through the sun spun gauze of October, and a little train of ox drawn wagons, struggling from Fort Kearney in Nebraska toward the next supply station, two hundred miles further, staggered from the impact and came to a halt on the old California trail of the '50's.

From the canvas shelter of one of the wagons a girl emerged and fought her way toward a man who, seemingly by virtue of the clergyman's neck-cloth above his buckskin coat, had come into command of the distracted party.

"Father," she called through the wind between them.

He took her hand and drew her back into the scant shelter of a wagon.

"Bunch the women and children—here," he shouted. "Where's John?"

Even in the urgency of the time she attempted an explanation.

"He was figuring a short cut on the map—and his wagon fell back among the last."

"Get some one else, then," her father called, "to gather the horses and cattle here. I'll see to the wagons."

The wheeling snow beat about her, obscuring her form suddenly as she went from him upon her mission.

Following the orders of the Reverend Elias Benton wagons were run up in a close circle to break the sweep of the wind. Next the horses and cattle were driven in as an inner circle; and lastly, each with his back between them and the storm, the men guarded their families. Like the hub of this battered wheel of fortune the Reverend Elias Benton stood and sent a prayer for the preservation out into the storm.

With the first clearing of the blizzard a speck was seen moving along the white horizon. It might presage either the ever feared attack by Indians or the miracle of a sign from the world behind.

The speck was watched with mingled terror and hope while decreasing distance magnified its proportions, and when those had become distinctly the outlines of a man and a horse, Elias Benton spoke.

"I was not afraid to ask," he said. "I must not be afraid to meet the answer of the Lord."

His daughter Memory rose from her knees and took his hand, glancing back over her shoulder as she did so. A young man separated himself from the kneeling crowd to join them. The three went forward together, and one by one the men folk of the party followed.

"Hello!" the stranger called, his voice faint and far; and as if still to reassure them, "Hello!" he repeated, riding up.

A circle closed in around him and as he brushed aside the sleet that hung from his coonskin cap, his eyes went over it, stopping short at the girl who stood beside the leader. Stiffly he swung down from the saddle and bared his head for a moment to the brutal wind.

"I'm Oregon Jones," he began haltingly. "I pilot cattle along the trail for the relief of stranded emigrants—it's a government job." As if to seek her understanding of the boastfulness his explanation necessitated his eyes sought the girl again, and jerked away painfully. "I been gathering cattle around Kearney, and when I come back yesterday morning they said you'd gone through. It's no time of year to try to make the next stop—so I come after you."

Lean and brown he hung against his horse, and the sag of his body told the story of his battle with the storm.

"Can we get back to Kearney?" Elias Benton asked.

The cattle pilot looked beyond the men to the heavy wagons with the women and children watching from them, and then back again at the girl who stood with her hand in the hand of the leader.

"There's too much snow for wheels," he said. "It's best not to try."

"But food! We thought we could provision at the next station—and there is no game in Winter——"

At her father's unfinished sentence which hung like a cry on his lips, the girl turned to the cattle pilot, confidently, expectantly.

"Back yonder's a hollow," Oregon Jones took up. "There's wood and a kind of shelter. Tomorrow I can go back and drive up the cattle from Kearney."

"The agent of the Lord," Elias Benton whispered and dropped to his knees.

"The government—the agent of the government—it's just my job," corrected Oregon Jones in an agony of embarrassment.

THE camp was made in the hollow and the cattle were driven up. Winter raged and stiffened and raged again until at last from somewhere beyond the snow there came a breath of warmth, promising Spring.

Then as if it had slept and awakened to a neglected purpose the camp grew clamorous of preparations for the trail.

The snow was already going when a woman descended from her wagon and picking her way across the thawing ground knocked on the frame of another wagon. She waited for a moment, listening, while some one stirred within and a baby fretted, then she found the opening in the canvas top and entered.

She began without preamble of greeting.

"They're going to be married—now—before we start!"

"Married! Why?" The second woman raised eyes full of tragic inquiry.

"John's not going along with us. He's got an idea again. Some Indian's told him about new gold fields he'll strike if he goes back and follows the Missouri north."

The mother laid her baby against her shoulder.

"Memory don't know what she's doing," she crooned to the measure of a lullaby. "She don't know. It's awful for women—any kind of pioneering is. But going away—like that! Memory don't know what she's doing."

The tale bearer drew her breath between her teeth.

"Maybe Memory don't know," she said. "But John Miles ought to. I told him last night! But you know John Miles—nothing else counts when he's got an idea!"

The baby slept against its mother's shoulder and the busy noises of the camp came sharp through the canvas.

Some one rode up, and there was the sound of a saddle unbuckled and flung under the wagon.

"Does Oregon know?"

The visitor waited a moment before she answered.

"No. And I don't want to be the one to tell him. That's one sure thing."

She was silent again, biting her lips against the sharp words that welled against them. But finally her tongue got the better of her purpose, and she broke out.

"Why can't it be Oregon instead of John? A woman would be safe with Oregon—which she never will be with John. She'd have a home, and he'd be in it when he was needed—he's dependable. But John Miles is never any place you think he is."

"Her mother's heart's broke. But Memory is so daft on John she can't see that.

I talked to her. I told her no man had a right to ask a woman—let alone a sixteen-year-old girl like her—to go away from her folks and friends and follow him off into the wilderness. All she answered was that she didn't expect anybody to understand John's courage and daring and fortitude and how he expected everybody else to be as noble as he was. I said I guessed John had daring all right, but I was afraid she would have to furnish the fortitude and courage.

"She just looked at me for a minute and said, 'It would be too bad for us to part in anger Aunt Debby.' So I shut up about John. But I couldn't help but ask her where she expected to get her wedding clothes, out here in the middle of nowhere, and linen for her house and the other things she'd need. She said John didn't care if she just had her old clothes, and she wasn't going to have a house, and that all she needed was John.

"It was then her mother seemed to give in. She'd kind of held out and hoped until she heard that. She went into the wagon and when she came out she held something over her arm—and gave it to Memory. It was her own wedding dress—figured taffeta. And she had the bonnet and all. She couldn't speak—just held it out—and Memory took it with the look of a saint that sees Heaven coming down."

Tears drowned the gossip in the woman's throat, and she got up abruptly and left the wagon, almost stumbling over a man who sat on the step outside, his face bent down over his hands which were fumbling at a bridle.

"Oregon!" she gasped.

"I rode Sam's horse in and sat down to fix the bridle," he mumbled. "I heard."

The woman stood looking at him.

"I don't know as it makes any difference," she burst out. "You've got to hear it, sometime. And I want to ask you—why in the name of all that's good and great you let Memory Benton get away from you? Why you didn't speak?"

The cattle pilot laid the leathers aside.

"If speaking would have got Memory Benton," he began, but stopped and getting up walked away from the wagon. The woman followed him.

"If speaking would have got her," he began again, "I'd have spoke the minute I rode in through the blizzard and saw her standing beside her father. But there was no use, even then. I don't know much about women. But I know this much—that Memory Benton is the kind that sticks to one man. If it'd been me—but it ain't me. It's John Miles. And she'll stick to him—and maybe she'll make a man of him."

"Maybe," his accuser snorted. "But more like she'll make a corpse of herself traipsing after him. Hardships and loneliness and neglect will kill her, you mark my word, if the Indians don't. Why, she's nothing more than a baby! Sixteen—and starting off alone with John Miles who hasn't the responsibility of a canary! Do you know what that means? Do you know what the best of pioneering means to a woman? And this—this! I'm her aunt, and she's the nearest I ever came to a child of my own."

Her voice broke and Oregon looked away. After a long time he spoke.

"If it'd comfort you any—and be any help to her," he said, "why, I been thinking about quitting my job anyway—and I could go with them. It ain't a friendly country, and people ought to understand the wild to get along in it. I was born out where nothing tamer'n a wildcat ever set foot until my parents come."

The woman reached out for his hand and tried to smile through her streaming eyes. He pulled it stiffly from his pocket and gave it to her.

THERE had always been the reflection of some beauty greater than her own in the face of Memory Benton; a kind of luminous sweetness softening the features cast in too strong a mold and gentling the boyish bravery of her eyes.

As she stooped before the fragmentary mirror under the canvas top of her father's wagon and received over her head the rustling breadths of her mother's wedding dress, this sweetness was the richer for the pallor of her face and the trembling of her lips.

When the dress slipped to its place about her body and her mother knelt to fumble at the fastenings, Memory put out her hands and raised the hidden face. It looked like the face of one who would die of grief, and tears rained into the cup of the daughter's hands.

"Don't mother—don't dear——"

The older woman wrenched away and

huddled down upon the floor, her head against the hem of the wide silk skirt.

"Memory—Memory—" she moaned.

The girl stood with her hands locked across her full young bosom, the thick brown fringes of her eyes heavy with tears.

So they fought out the ancient pain that had come upon them, and when it was laid they went on with the gay solemnity of tapes and buttons, even laughing a little, through the salt of their sorrow still in their throats, when the high feathers of the bonnet swept the canvas above them.

As they crossed the open circle of the camp John Miles came out to meet them. His head was thrown back above his knotted stock, and the eagerness of the poet and adventurer, the vagrant and lover were mingled in his face.

His wagon stood ready with four glossy oxen stolid under their yokes and two more for relief tied behind. Around it the emigrants of the party were gathered; and piled on the seat were gifts gleaned from the poverty of travel—a shawl with a crimson border—a baking of bread—a rabbit dressed and jointed for the first meal on the way—a teapot with the tea stains of half a century in its crackle.

John swept his bride into his arms.

"Look at it Memory," he laughed pointing to the wagon. "There isn't a strap nor a buckle I haven't rubbed. I even oiled the hoofs of the oxen like my own boots. The wagon runs like a buggy. Oregon will have to ride hard to keep up."

Memory turned to the waiting company.

"Where is Oregon?" she asked.

"Rode off a couple of days ago, and hasn't come back yet. Said something about notifying them in Kearney that he was quitting. One thing sure, we aren't going to wait for him. If he's not here when we're ready to start, we'll go alone."

Memory looked up with an expression of quick protest and was about to speak; when suddenly the order of a ceremonial began to shape itself and instinctively she moved to a ritual. A little path opened in the gathering and Elias Benton passed through in his long gown, with his book in his hand. In a quick convulsion of realization Memory turned to her mother. Then John took her hand and they walked forward together. The father stooped and kissed the tears that glistened under the high bonnet. It was his farewell and his wordless admonition, and it calmed them both.

" 'Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God.' "

The words of the holy office ceased, and sharp through the hush came the pound of hard riding. Fear, close under whatever show of confidence the pioneer might wrest from his hardships wrote itself across every face. As if prayer hung upon the movement, Elias Benton raised his eyes slowly from his book.

"It is Oregon," he said, and stood waiting.

The belated guest rode up and, swinging his leg clear of the stirrup, poised himself above his saddle and dismounted. He held a bulky fragile parcel wrapped in paper, and advancing to Memory bent from the waist and held it out. She took it and pulled back the paper wrapping.

It was a bouquet of cotton roses and forget-me-nots.

"Oregon," she faltered.

"I thought there'd be some real flowers—in pots—back in Kearney. But there warn't, and a woman that sells hats had these."

Shame flooded his countenance, and he retreated to the margin of the gathering and stood with his hand in his horse's mane.

" 'Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God."

A woman sobbed. The sun caught the sheen of Memory Benton's wedding dress and rested as if amazed in the bright dyes of her bouquet. Back of the camp a cow bawled for her calf, and the oxen stirred under their yokes.

The words of the marriage service droned on in the church of the open world.

AFTER the partings, after the last long hallo of farewell had died in the widening spaces between the ways, the single wagon and its one horseman guard followed the old trail back to the Missouri and struck north over untracked ground. The promise of Spring fulfilled itself and Summer came tanning the verdure and baking the eternal bunch grass and sage brush between its fires of sun and sand.

"It is good to have you with us, Oregon," Memory said to him one day. He was following in the wheel-ruck behind the wagon, his head up in thought.

Memory sat on the step of the wagon, catching at the wind which now and then scoured through the hot grass. On the seat ahead John drove with listless hands, his eyes dreaming sullenly along the earth that curved away and away forever to the west.

"I've done mighty little," Oregon answered without lowering his eyes. "There's mighty little can be done for a woman in these parts.

Memory caught resentfully at his implication.

"John has made me very happy," she said, and he had no reply.

The wagon rolled and heaved along until the first cool breath from sundown came traversing the plain, when suddenly it came to a halt.

Jumping down Memory ran forward, and Oregon mounted and came up from the other side, his rifle ready in his hand.

John stood on the seat pointing with his goad, incoherencies tumbling from his lips.

Something vague and fairy pink, like a fringe of cool shells set up against the flaming garden of sunset, bordered the west.

"Mountains!" John was shouting. "Mountains—mountains!"

Memory climbed up beside him and stood looking away toward their journey's end.

Oregon lifted himself in his stirrups. The earth still quivered with the heat of the day that was passing, and miles rolled on and on ahead up into the very furnace of the sky. Geese flew against the orange light keening their loneliness. Beside John stood Memory, her hair moist around her sweet face, her eyes braving the utter fastnesses of the world. She was going on, farther and farther into the loneliness until the very isolation of Heaven itself should be about her head.

"Maybe I could pick up a settler and his wife somewheres, if I scouted a little," Oregon said, "and get them to go along. It'll be lonesome——"

"We don't want any settlers," John interrupted excitedly. "We're going alone—we're going to have the country and the gold in it to ourselves. We don't care about the loneliness. We're going to stick it out—stay with it until our fortune is made. We are, aren't we Memory? That's the bargain, isn't it? We're to stay with it until the gold comes out."

"Yes, we will stay with it John," Memory answered.

Now, as the days went by the ox team climbed, at first the gentle swelling ground of the rising plains, then the sharper angles of the foot-hills, and at last the mountains themselves threw up their granite bulwarks against invasion.

Up where the air was so still and thin that the turning of a pebble was like the shattering of a crystal, they stopped. Oregon cut scrub firs and pines for shelter, and Memory alighted from the cramped wagon with a long sigh of relief.

John was for striking off at once into the hills with hammer and pick. But Oregon stood out for the immediate erection of a log house. His insistence brought down wrath upon his head, but with maddening patience he calculated the direction of winds and measured off ground in a protected quarter.

They raised the roof tree with its one end resting on the flat of a granite butte; which chipped away and fashioned to their purpose furnished at once the back wall of the house and half the chimney.

Oregon had barely time to build himself a less weather-worthy abode in a ravine below when the Winter came down from the altitudes and put the white lock of frost and snow upon the treasures in the hills. And while Memory looked to the ways of her house and Oregon hewed rude household equipment from fallen timbers, John fumed at the loss of a season.

The Spring came reluctantly, and with it came shadows that slipped away before they were clearly seen, and the intangible evidence of lurking menaces. Obsessed by his hopes and thoughtless of everything else, John walked without fear, irritated by Memory's lingering hands and Oregon's warnings.

The snow still flecked the upper meadows when, carrying his hammer and pick and a canvas sack for specimens, he climbed the rocky seam that ridged itself along the summit back of the cabin.

Memory stood at the door listening to the snap of his hammer after his climbing form had been lost to view among the rocks above. Twice as she stood she felt the swift clutch at her heart of one who senses danger.

Once she went out until she could see down the ravine where Oregon lived. He would hear if she called. But John would hear her too, and be angry that she had brought him from his work. She could run down the ravine, and Oregon would come back with her and sit whittling outside her door, calming her fears with his presence. But while she was gone she would not hear the tapping hammer that reiterated her loved one's safety. And so she stood in the doorway, her every faculty strained to read the meaning of her fears.

And standing so she heard a cry.

She caught up the gun behind the door and screamed for Oregon; and still screaming gathered her skirts out of the way of snagging shrubs and ran toward the cry.

John Miles stood with his back against the granite ridge, his pick raised above his head. Crawling toward him through the underbrush three brown shapes approached from different angles. Memory gained a hill that lifted her above the intervening rocks, and raised her gun. But her arms came down, flat against her sides, clamped there by other arms, naked and strong; and the gun went scuttling away among the rocks.

She shut her eyes and in a second of clearest vision there came the recollection of a help of the past. She felt again the bitter whip of the blizzard, heard her father's prayer—and saw Oregon riding up over the shrouded world. Prayer flooded her being—prayer confident of answer—and then as if sleep had come upon her mind, she went down into oblivion.

When her consciousness returned she was in Oregon's arms lunging down the hill toward the cabin. She raised her head and looked back. Something had dyed the face of the rock ridge red, and a crumpled heap was sunk against its base. Her soul went back again into the refuge of the tortured.

Oregon laid her on the rude bed in the cabin, straightening her skirts against the violation of his own eyes. Then he went out, and alone on the snow-flecked height he buried the warm wet something that had been John Miles.

"IF WE start now, we can get to Omaha before Winter."

Oregon stooped in the doorway of the cabin, his coonskin cap dangling in his hand. From her seat beside the window Memory was looking up the fresh slashed vista through the underbrush to the mound below the ridge.

"That is if we start now," he repeated.

She drew her eyes away from the vista.

"I am not going," she said.

"But Memory, you can't stay—alone."

"I will not be alone, Oregon."

A light glimmered on the face of the pioneer.

"John is with me—just up there," she went on.

The light waned on the face in the doorway, and the old pain came back.

"You can come back," he pleaded quietly.

"John said we would stay with it, and I agreed. It was our bargain." She looked away again alone the vista.

"But Memory, John thought he would be with you. This is no place for a woman alone. Look at your little hands—you couldn't even do the work to hold your claim."

"You will help me, Oregon."

The coonskin cap trembled and the man put it behind him.

"Settlers will come after a while," Memory was saying. "Then if the claim is good I can hire some one. But until then—you helped John—you will help me."

"But it's dangerous Memory—I can't bear you should face the danger of it."

"The worst that could happen, has happened. There is nothing left to frighten me, now."

The sweetness of her trust in him, the pain of her living love for the dead shook him, and he turned away.

It was Spring and the fragrance of a virgin world was in the air. The blood of strength and youth pounded in his veins. He had hungered and thirsted for her—and now she was alone. She had said settlers would come. Yes, in a dozen years, perhaps. In a dozen years—in one year—he could have lived his measure, pressed down and running over. Law was a myth handed on from a world he did not know. In his world men took what they wanted by the strength of their hands. He had given her the chance of escape, and she had not taken it. The risk was her own.

"I am going to stick to my bargain with John. I am going to stay until the gold comes out." Her voice was hushed and the beauty of suffering lay upon her like a benediction. "You are here, Oregon. I have my friend——"

She rose weakly to her feet swaying a little as she came to him with her hands held out. Shame for his strength, burning shame for his very manhood scorched him. He stepped into the cabin and put his steady hands under her elbows holding her to her feet. She raised her face giving him the clear depths of her eyes in utter trust; and he gave back the honesty of his own.

"Tomorrow I'll come over and see what you need done," he said. "I can begin chipping off a little rock up there, maybe, and sacking it. Some day we'll get it down to Omaha—perhaps. And even if we don't the sacked rock will show work done and keep the government from asking questions. Anyway, it'll be a good barricade for the house."

So began the years in which the fortune of Memory Miles grew, sack by sack, against the south wall of her house. Settlers came, children were born, and the dead were buried. Early days added themselves to history, and Memory Miles walked through the white fire of her grief to the healing of patient constancy.

Oregon came from his claim on spare days to blast and pick and gouge at the high rock rim against which John Miles had died, and the quartz he sacked and stacked against the wall of the house below was flecked and strung with gold.

But the haul to Omaha was long, and even to Butte, howling child of the West, born under their very eyes, the way was too steep for heavy loads. So the canvas sacks accumulated and rotted in the weather spilling treasure against the door.

"THE railroad's coming to Butte," Oregon announced one day. "If it ever comes here——"

He hoisted a sack from his shoulder to the top tier of the pile, and turned to Memory.

"You'll be rich, Memory," he finished, and they stood musing over the product of the years.

"I told John I'd stay with it until the gold came out," she said.

"And you have, you sure have," he responded.

"I made a bargain—bargains are easy things to make, and hard to stick to, sometimes. I couldn't have done it—alone."

He winced almost imperceptibly and his eyes flew to the obliterated mound below the ridge.

"I don't mean that," she said quickly. "I don't mean that it was John. At first it helped me to know that John was there; but after a while John got to be—well, sort of like the memory of a child that had died while it was very little, before it could be leaned upon and needed. It's been you, Oregon. It's always been you, right from the first. You—helping—making the nice things of my life for me."

Her voice died and she turned away looking down the ravine. The wind of a late Spring came slipping along the green slopes, stirring the old pain and sending it aching through the body of the man.

"Thanks, Memory—thanks," he stammered.

Three years later the *Mount Baldy Eagle* carried the following item:

> There will be a lively time in these parts when the first train pulls out over the new Pony Line for Butte. The program for the ceremonies has just been completed and the honors of the occasion will go to Mrs. Memory Miles, who will drive the last spike, a gold one, in the last rail, and who will be the guest of honor of the railroad on the opening excursion down to Butte.
>
> Mrs. Miles was the first white woman to push this far into the Bitter Roots, and she has stayed with it. The opening excursion will be her first trip since arriving here twenty-three years ago by ox team.
>
> The first gold discovered in the district was found on her claim. She will take several tons of rich quartz with her down to Butte that ought to yield a tidy sum for a widow woman. Mrs. Miles has been a good citizen.

On the morning set for the opening of the Pony Line, dust puffed up against the sunrise back of Miles Rise and blew forward on the awakening wind. Two mules labored up over the swelling ground that rimmed in the Miles claim from the road to Mount Baldy. They were followed by two more and yet another two until twelve in all were on the ridge toiling at their long tugs. Then a wagon rolled up after them and a strange picture was illumined in the flaming shaft of dawn.

High above the backs of the mules a man and a woman swayed on the spring seat of the wagon. The man held a single line in his hand and from time to time he took a pebble from the pocket of his long brown linen coat and casting it with an accuracy born of long experience flicked the ear of one of the distance leaders, urging the animal on. Behind him like an unstable mountain the load in the wagon-box rose in tiers of raw new canvas sacks.

Against this background the woman flashed in the sun like some gaudy resurrected flower of another day. Above her curls a bonnet flaunted towering plumes and flowers. A cape about her shoulders shrouded the bosom of a gown that flowed out below in voluminous breadths, billowing in the wind and throwing back the sun from its rich old sheen. Her feet were shod in heelless slippers laced with ribbons over her ankles, and she braced them out a little before her against the high apron of the wagon. Thus steadied, her hands were free to clasp before her in the stiff propriety of another day a bouquet of faded cloth roses and forget-me-nots.

At the foot of the hill a waiting wagon fell in behind the mule team. A mile farther down the road two more teams lengthened the train.

The sun bored its way up through the sky shortening the shadows of the spruce timber toward the noonday minimum.

Dust rose in burning vapor and on the down slope the brakes screamed on the hot wheels. Memory Miles on the high wagon seat covered her old bouquet with her handkerchief and under her high bonnet her eyes gazed away through the dust to the open spaces of the world.

"Scared, Memory?" the man asked.

"No," she answered. "Why?"

"I was just wondering. It's a big day for you. This here," He thrust his thumb over his shoulder indicating the growing procession behind. "That there—" he nodded forward in the direction the road took to the little town of Mount Baldy—"the celebration—driving the gold spike—speeches and the band and the excursion down—all for you. I thought you might be scared."

"It's not for me, Oregon. It's for everybody. They've waited a long time for a railroad in these parts."

He went on as if he had not heard her.

"And the rock we're taking down. When you get it to the smelter in Butte you'll be a rich woman—the richest woman in the country maybe. I thought you might be scared."

The following behind the mule team grew long and varied, and greetings from the roadside were more frequent as the procession neared the town.

"You remember how long it took to come up those hills?" It was Memory who broke the silence between them, and she pointed ahead down the sloping sides of the mountains.

He nodded his answer.

"It was here an ox gave out with the heat and the long pull. John wanted to lighten the load by throwing some of the things away. But you wouldn't let him. You said I'd need all we had. You made him go slower and take it all. Remember?"

He nodded again, wondering.

"And my dress—you remember my dress?"

He looked down at the soft splendor of her dress; at the flowers she held—the little cloth shoes showing below the spreading hem. The years had touched her very beautifully. The curls under her bonnet were thick and brown, and the richness of her womanhood was under every billowing fold of silk.

He turned his eyes away for some relieving interest.

"This is my wedding dress."

He made no answer, only jerked his eyes ahead to a towering hill.

"It's the best I have. I haven't been to town since I came, and it's the best I have," she went on. "But that isn't the reason I am wearing it. It's because—because—well, I thought I was beginning my life when I wore it—that other time. But it's today—only today that I am really beginning——"

Her eyes cried to him for help, but he did not see for the blind pain in his own.

"You rode to Kearney for this bouquet." Her hands caressed the old cloth stems.

"Memory," he murmured.

"Back of us here is my fortune—the fortune you have given me through more than twenty years. And back of me——"

A woman at a cross-roads raised a child in her arms and Memory Miles smiled down.

"And back of me," she began again, "is my bargain with John. I stayed with it—and now the gold has come out! The rock is on its way to the smelter. I stayed with it—and my bargain is done. If John could see me now, he would say I stayed with it."

The raw buildings of the new station came into view, and the idlers on the porch of the general store cheered as the mule team passed. A Chinaman thrust his head through the window of a cook-car on a siding, and a gang at work paused to look and wipe away their sweat.

Rattling out of its haven in the “Livery and Feed,” the ancient Wells Fargo stage filled in the gap respectfully made for it behind the leading wagon, and Whooping Steve crooked his knee above the brake.

“You and I have lived a long time for John.” Breathlessly the woman tried to drive the difficult words after each other from her lips, and failed. “But now—now—” she floundered.

She put one steadying hand down on the seat beside her, and the man’s great fist set itself like a tender vise around it.

“Memory,” he murmured. “Memory.”

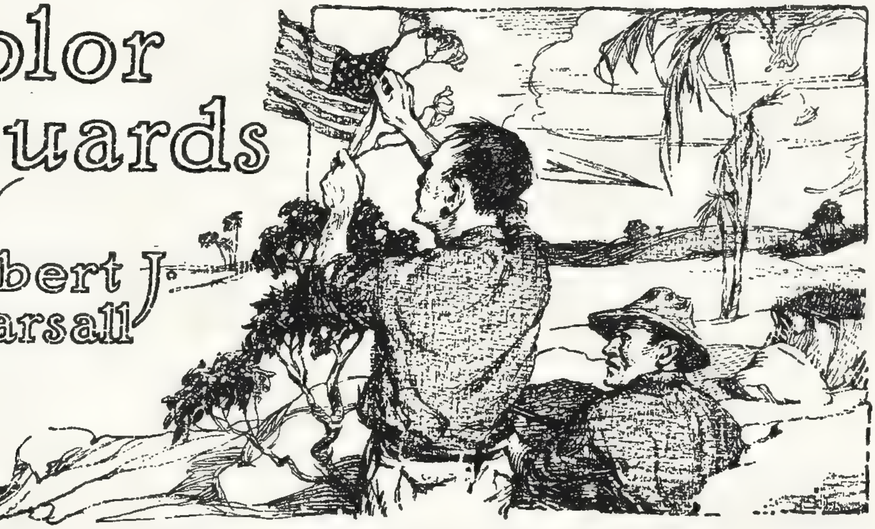
Then yelping through the familiar bedlam of men and dogs and harness, rose a long peremptory summons. Voices lagged in open mouths and children hid scared faces in their mother’s skirts. On the face of Memory Miles dawned a light, the reflection of which had confused two generations into counting her a beauty.

The train whistled. The Pony Line was open. Beyond the rocky screen of the hill the future was climbing up toward them.

Color Guards

by

Robert J. Pearsall



Author of “Anting-Anting,” “The Road’s End,” etc.

I HAD another confab with that Don Juan of a *presidente* today,” said Hackett, as he watched the column of American cavalry wind down the trail out of sight. “He chewed off some more lingo about a pot of gold somewhere, and a place called Sorsorgon where you shake trees for anything you want, like Aladdin rubbed the lamp. He loves us like a brother, that man!”

Rummy Marlow grunted skeptically, turned away from the blazing heat of the doorway, and relaxed inertly on his bamboo sleeping-mat. “It’s a good thing for us Williams cleaned up our Brown Brothers’ shooting-irons before he left.”

“Don’t you believe he did,” contradicted Hackett. “These gugus could hide a twelve-inch gun under an altar cloth. But we’re pretty well heeled ourselves, and besides, Lucban’s learned his little lesson. He don’t know we’re not exactly in with the Government, and——”

“—— th’ Government!” interrupted Foldowski, not vindictively or vehemently, but almost as one repeats a ritual.

“Sure, and we’ll *all* drink to that,” put in Sheehy affably.

Hackett having by this time joined the three others who sprawled on the floor of the nipa shack, the unclean-looking earthen jug of vino was passed around. All drank deeply excepting Rummy Marlow, whose thirst was usually an unappeasable Sahara of longing. He tilted the jug to his lips, but his tongue closed the mouth of it.

None of the four betrayed the least chagrin that Lieutenant Williams, after a six months' garrison in Bontoc, had finally withdrawn his troop without once recognizing the fact of their existence. It was what they had expected. They were deserters, and deserters from the service are not wanted back, despite regulations to the contrary. It costs money to feed them, takes the time of good men to guard them, and if they are restored to duty they are weak cogs in a machine that must be infallible. And this was in the days of the Empire, when the fate of a regiment might hang upon the dependability of a single sentry.

"Well, Sorsorgon's as pretty a name for a place as any," commented Marlow, in the clear, incisive tones that had early in his enlistment won him the nickname of "Professor," and that the ravages of drink had but partially coarsened. "What does it matter where we are? Capricorn to Cancer, it's all the same to me."

The four talked at great length and with gradually increasing incoherence, but the upshot of the consultation was that they should accept the proffered guidance to the unknown region of Sorsorgon. Really the proffer veiled a command, and each of them knew it. Lucban was determined to rid his *barrio* of their parasitical presence. But it suited their sense of what was manly to pretend to go voluntarily, just as it suited a certain plan of Lucban's to send them away in friendly fashion over a route fixed by himself.

Lucban had a difficult middle-of-the-road part to play. To the south were the fierce Moro tribes, to the north the new government of *Americano* interlopers; he feared and hated both equally, and held his job as *presidente* of the Visayans by the sufferance of both.

So the next day Lucban approached the quartet of white men with a renewed hint of what was good for them, and they took it. But when the following morning he pressed upon them an escort of fifteen armed Visayans, their respect for their own judgment dwindled to the measure of their respect for Lucban's sincerity, which was zero.

"You my *amigos*," Lucban told them. "*Mucha malo* men to the south—ah, *mucha malo!* You go alone, *poco tiempo* they *matar* you, they kill you with ants. Now my brave men *hablar* them let you go to Sorsorgon. You get to Sorsorgon, *mucha grande* country, *mucha grande* people, *mucha grande* gold. *Adios, amigos mio!*" And Lucban smiled the peculiar smile of Malayan duplicity, which makes up in mouth-wideness for its blank opacity of eye.

"An' we could 'a' worked a sneak last night," lamented Sheehy disgustedly as they left the *barrio*. "We could 'a' gone alone and where we wanted to. Now we go where these monkey-minded names o' sin take us. Escort be ——! 'Tis prisoners we are."

"Are you just getting wise?" asked Hackett. And Marlow, upon whose ammunition belt swung a canteen full of vino, started to sing wildly, but in a perfect tenor:

Down in the walls of prison,
  Down in the walls of jail,
Down in the walls of prison I lie,
  With no one to go my bail.

There was much more of it. Marlow had had a gentleman's bringing-up, but his life had evidently been varied. His memory reacted strangely to strange stimuli.

FOR four days the party traveled to the southeast, now through a Brobdingnagian jungle through which the Visayans had to hack their way with *kris* and bolo, now across a God-forsaken and nature-punished land of foot-blistering black rocks and lifeless sand, now over long, level plains of blasted brown grass shriveling in the white flame of the sun.

Here and there, on the edge of a jungle, along the banks of a stream that seemed a miracle in that land of dryness and heat, they came to a village. At these villages they renewed their supplies. From day to day, however, the people of the *barrios* ran more to jaw and less to forehead, looked at the white men more scowlingly, fed them more reluctantly, encompassed them, it seemed, in a vaster volume of hate.

But all the time the leader of the guard that protected and yet held them prisoner spoke to them in his Visayan-Spanish-English of the strange delights of the promised land ahead, the mysterious Sorsorgon. Rarer things than gold *he* promised them, the pleasures of an unviolated Eden—power and glory, too, for was there not a legend among these people of four white men coming to rule them? And he dwelt much upon the good fortune of his white *amigos* in having been so favored by his master.

The four deserters thought that he lied, but it was as well to wait and see, especially since they could do nothing else. The watch kept over them was unobtrusive, but it was none the less close. Besides, the attitude of the natives made freedom from the Visayans a condition of very doubtful desirability. They could hardly hope to beat back alone across that openly hostile country.

"And yet," said Hackett, "we're four armed men without a country, and we ought to be worth adopting. Fact is, we've got to get adopted. We can't stand on our own legs forever, that's plain."

"You mean you'd join these people?" asked Marlow.

"Sure. Why not? Better that than getting scragged, isn't it? What are we out here for, anyway?"

A startled, doubtful look came to Marlow's habitually reckless face, but he said nothing.

"I lak t' soldier with the gugus," agreed Foldowski. "No —— regulations an' showin' quarter." And the Irishman chimed in with:

"Faith, and the idea promises fun. 'Tis a sportin' people these are, too, by the looks of them, and one 'twill be worth while to win freedom for."

They were, of course, reckoning without due knowledge of Mohammedan Malay character. To be accepted by the Moros as an ally, a white man must change not only his allegiance, but the color of his skin, the shape of his skull, and the nature of his soul. Other Filipino tribes are less finicky.

By noon of the fifth day the party came to a place where they could see the ocean shining far out beyond a great barrier of rocks.

When they were within six hundred yards of these rocks, an indefinite number of men, gay in the brilliantly colored sashes and head-gear of the Moro warrior, began to string out from their shelter. At the same time the Visayan guard drew a little apart from the Americans, quiet, watchful, cruelly expectant, complacent, too, with the satisfaction of a good work accomplished.

"Who are they?" asked Hackett sharply of the Visayan leader.

"*Amigos*," the man replied hastily. "All *amigos*."

Hackett hesitated, but Sheehy, with swifter intuitions, knew that the Visayan lied, knew that Sorsorgon was a myth, and that the end of their march was here. More in rage than in fear—though the stories he had heard of what happened to Moro prisoners were not nice—he flung up his Springfield and sent a bullet crashing into the treacherously smiling mouth.

"To the water, byes!" he bellowed, reversed his rifle, and smashed two more to the ground with the butt.

The suddenness of the attack, the slowness of the Visayans—who are not natural fighters—to react to the unexpected, and the chance of a great boulder fifty yards to the left, saved the white men. Before the Visayans began shooting, the Americans had attained the shelter of the boulder.

Then the Visayans, having no stomach for a charge, had to seek shelter, which they did by retreating over a slope. The Moros started in on a run, but they were still too far away to be dangerous. The fugitives started a running fight diagonally across the descending slope toward a great cliff that rose like a fortress from the beach level.

It was good luck that they attained it, but no miracle. All four had served long enough to know how to take advantage of every inequality of ground, how by alternate rushes and stands to keep the enemy at a respectful distance, how by rapid firing that simulated the action of a machine-gun to overcome a disadvantage in numbers. And the *kris*-bearing Malay, though a fiend when it comes to close quarters, is among the worst of marksmen.

Still they were fortunate. By no misjudgment of their deserts or of the justice of Providence could they have expected to find at the end of their run a natural fortification so exactly suited to their use. It took all their agility to climb the twenty-five feet to the top of the point. When they attained it they found a level ledge about fifteen feet across, covered with loose rocks and boulders. One dwarfed and lonely shrub stood like a sentinel in the middle of it. Back of it the cliff dropped abruptly to a deep pool of the sea.

Panting, they threw themselves on their faces to escape the scattered shots.

"So that was Lucban's game," rasped

Hackett. "The flea-bitten coward! He was looking to curry favor with the Moros by furnishing them with some amusement. Well, we'll give it to them."

They hoped for an immediate attack, but none developed. The Moros, of whom there were a hundred or more, settled themselves in a thin cordon around the rock, and waited for the favoring night.

The circle of hate into which the Americans had felt themselves entering had become a circle of death. Its visible manifestation was that thin line of warriors, but back of that line, for a hundred miles in every direction, stretched a country of hard-bitten fanatics which would drain itself of strength until they were destroyed.

Escape was a possibility remote beyond consideration, and they knew it. But there was nothing to prevent them from spending the remaining hours or days of their life worthily.

AFTER a parapet of rocks had been built all around the edge of the level space, and other larger rocks had been poised precariously so that a touch of a hand would send them hurtling down the cliff, Marlow did a strange thing. Without speaking, he opened his knapsack and produced a small American flag, filched during a *fiesta* in Bontoc, and since preserved secretly from what mixture of motives he only knew. With a shamefaced, deprecating, but defiant look, as of a man caught in a love-affair, he began fastening it to the top of the starved shrub.

"What the blazes—!" began Hackett, watching him.

Sheehy and Foldowski looked up, and Foldowski began to curse. But Sheehy broke in sharply:

"Leave him be. Need ye look at it if ye don't like it, eh?" Then he added slightingly, "I'm thinking he's a weak sister anyway, and he may need the help of it to fight."

It was with that apology for its weakness, and with muttered excuses for Marlow that his nerves had been weakened by drink, that the forlorn hope accepted its standard.

The remainder of the day the Americans rested. That night they divided the watch and conserved their energy. Knee-deep in the morning hours, at that time when the civilized man's nerves are slackest, the attack came.

The long wait had perhaps maddened the Moros. Perhaps, too, they minimized the strength of their opponents. At any rate, once started, they cast strategy to the dogs, and came storming up the face of the cliff in close order, a hell-roaring, maniacal cluster of brown humanity. They climbed with monkeyish agility, thick as flies. In the dim moonlight they seemed to the watchers above uncanny and terrible, like a band of squirming naked devils.

But the very ferocity of their attack was its weakness. The defenders had but to empty their rifles into the brown of them, nearly every shot a hit. And when the Moros neared the top of the cliff, and its steepness increased, they got in each other's way. Finally there were but two points at which further ascent was possible.

It was over these points that the Americans had poised the boulders. When the foremost Moros were nearly to the crest, destruction seemed to leap upon them. Those who had time sprang clear of the bounding rocks and landed at the foot of the cliff. A dozen or more were caught and crushed.

The unexpected disaster took the edge off the fighting spirit of those who were not in the way of the twin avalanches. Sprinkled with renewed rifle fire, they retreated hastily, carrying their fallen with them.

The little garrison was not entirely unscathed. The hilt of a thrown bolo had caught Hackett in the temple, and he did not awake until the hot red sun was brightening the east. He lay in a sort of semisomnolence for awhile, not knowing what had happened, more than half resenting the swift return of his consciousness, dreading to open his eyes lest he find himself in a Moro camp. When he finally forced them open they fell on Marlow's fluttering bit of bunting.

His eyes filled and his face quivered for a moment at this assurance of temporary victory. But he steadied himself instantly, and when he finally called attention to the fact that he was still alive by suddenly springing to his feet—albeit a little dizzily—his features were shaped to a grin.

There is that in any successful action which somehow quickens the soul, no matter how irrevocably disaster lurks around the corner. All the joy of life hinges on that fact, since every life is in the end defeat.

The four men spent the next few hours in a spirit approaching elation. They cached their provisions, figured they had enough to last them on half rations for five days, and then set about renewing their damaged ramparts.

Foldowski, scrambling down the outer face of the cliff nearly to the water's edge, made two discoveries. The lower section of the rock was sweating fresh water. In the pool below there was fish. Clothing spread over the exuding surface and wrung out at intervals should yield enough water to at least keep them alive. And the fish would furnish an ill-balanced ration—if they could be caught!

"We can stand them off forever," exulted Marlow. Marlow was in better spirits than either of the others—indeed, strangely enough, in better spirits than they had ever seen him. "Or until we die of scurvy or something, unless they get us first," he added more sanely, if still whimsically.

"What's that?" cried Hackett, darting a look upward.

There was a whirring above their heads like a swarm of locusts. Half a dozen arrows whizzed point downward and shivered themselves against the rocks. Innumerable others, badly aimed, carried over their heads and dropped into the sea.

"Do they think to kill us with pinpricks?" asked Sheehy with a laugh, as one slithered through his hat brim.

But Hackett dove for his blanket and began folding it frantically.

"Look out!" he warned. "They're poisoned. *Bashlai* they use—I've read about it." And in a moment the four men were crouching beneath their hastily improvised woolen shields.

After the Moros got the range the arrows fell in showers. Some were wrapped in flaming oil-soaked cotton, and directed against the flag. One of them found its mark, entangled itself in the folds of the flag, and went on burning. At the immediate risk of his life, Sheehy smothered the flames, and tore the standard down, to be replaced later.

"No use giving the twist-brained monkeys anything to gloat over," he explained sheepishly.

Fifteen minutes later the Moros advanced tentatively, still spraying the ledge with arrows. But the attack broke down under rifle fire, and they withdrew for the day.

With branches torn from the shrub upon which the flag again flew, the defenders contrived a permanent support for the blankets, laid one on top of the other. These provided not only shelter from further showers of arrows, but, when they were resting, from the direct glare of the sun.

That night the Moros made no attack in force. But four *juramatados*, avidly grasping at their chance of hacking their way through an unbeliever's body to eternal bliss, crept stealthily up the rocks.

Sheehy was on watch when the head of the first of them rose like a black mask above the breastworks. Sheehy let out a warning cry; the Moro leaped like a tiger over the parapet, and came for him with a rush.

The point of Sheehy's bayonet caught him in the chest, and held him beyond bolo's reach of the white man. Lusting to kill and to die killing, the *juramatado* seized the gun with his left hand and pressed the bayonet through his body, while his curved blade swung over the shortening distance. But Sheehy's finger was pressing the trigger, he pumped lead into him, and the Moro crumpled and fell.

The others did not get so far, nor was ammunition wasted on them. Again the cunningly poised stones were loosed, and for hours cries of rage and defiance from three sorely injured Moros rose from the base of the cliff and tortured the air. At last a rescue party crept up through the grass and dragged them away.

This was the first of many like attacks. The four men repelled them all, and escaped serious injury themselves for a long time. It was not so marvelous. Theirs was an almost impregnable position, and they kept adding to its strength with crude but effective engineering. And they found their own endurance multiplied by the grimness of their necessity.

After that first night they were not called to measure their strength against that of the enemy *en masse*. The Moro leader had found the cost too great, and was willing to wait on the work of his sure ally, Famine. But to the individual warriors the continued existence of the white men was too keen an exasperation to be endured. It challenged their bravery; it stimulated their natural ferocity; above all, it fanned their fanaticism to a white heat of fury. To this day the Moros name the place Dead Man's Rock in memory of the many men gone mad with the hope of Paradise that fell before the bullets, the bayonets, or the boulders of its hard-bitten defenders.

Once the Moro *datto*, desperate at this resultless depletion of his fighting strength, hit upon a plan to end the matter swiftly. On a dark night when the wind blew strong off the land, he sent men with buckets filled with inflammable oils and grease to saturate the sides of the rock.

Working silently as shadows, they smeared the mixture from the base nearly to the summit, and in convenient niches near the summit they placed full buckets. Under these buckets they laid crudely manufactured bombs, which, exploding, would send the flaming oil high in the air, to be carried by the wind upon the Americans. They applied a match, and withdrew swiftly.

The liquid fire carried completely over the cliff; the whole rock became wrapped in sheets of flame, like a gigantic brand of tinder. But the white men saved themselves by creeping down into the water, and when morning came the sight of the flag refastened to the charred stump of the shrub filled the measure of the Moros' angry disappointment.

It was Foldowski who had saved the flag. He apologized for it afterward in his makeshift English.

"Th' —— niggers 'ud think they'd did somethin' if they'd burned it," he grunted.

The four were in bad shape by now. Their canteens were empty, and the damp cloths wrung at intervals barely moistened their mouths. They were tortured every minute by an inconceivable thirst. When they slept they dreamed of cool streams, and they would awake swallowing avidly the dreadful moistureless air of the tropic Summer.

They fished with bent pins and lines made by fraying the canvas of their knapsacks, and they caught on an average a fish a day. With the help of the fish they made their beans and hardtack last a week. After that they ate fish alone. Even starving as they were, it came to nauseate them.

On the tenth night Marlow was killed on watch. The others never knew exactly how it happened. There was a shot and a wild, triumphant yell that fairly yanked them out of their light and feverish sleep. They found Marlow slashed through the ribs, and a Moro almost on top of him with a bullet-hole in his forehead.

Marlow lasted till the morning, but he did not speak until very near the end. When he knew he was dying he whispered wistfully and a little apologetically:

"Boys, I've lied to you—a bit. I never did see things exactly your way. The only decent thing in my life, the first year of my service— And these last few days— Will you keep the flag flying after I'm gone?"

"Old man—" began Hackett, with sudden indignant vehemence. Then he caught himself, and the three promised solemnly. But to each other they made it plain that the promise was for his sake alone.

They buried him deeply, fashioning a crypt out of rocks as best they could, and leaving no telltale surface marks to show the Moros where he lay. When he was gone they began to envy him.

One morning they awoke to find that the Moros had ended their fishing for them. During the night a great dragnet had been dropped in a semi-circle outside their cliff, anchored with rocks, and supported at the top with buoys.

Sheehy, who kept his strength better than the other two, tried to swim out and cut it. He got half way, and then sank exhausted. But he had carried a line made of strips of cloth around his waist, and Hackett and Foldowski pulled him to shore.

"I was at ease, and ye brought me back," he muttered hoarsely from his parched throat. "For why did ye do it? And yet I'm glad. The puzzle of it!"

THE Moros began to shoot more burning arrows at the flag. It must have tormented them, that emblem of an alien and hated power flaunting itself in their very midst. To destroy it became a madness with them equal to their mad desire to destroy the lives of its defenders.

In the pangs of slow dissolution most men lose their egotism. Petty things fall away, and big things stand revealed. These three men were dying by days, and each moment of these days was an agony. The thought of something greater than self was needed to enable them to endure.

They devoted themselves to keeping the flag flying. None of them analyzed his motives, save that the promise to Marlow must be kept. They moved their blanket shelter close to the charred pole, so they could keep better watch.

They kept the flag constantly moist with salt water borne with infinitely painful labor up the cliff. Thus whenever a burning arrow pierced it, and hung, as sometimes happened, in the folds, they were generally able to snatch it away before the damp cloth was even charred. Once Foldowski was slow in doing this, and a corner of the flag was burned off. He was so weak from pain, hunger, and thirst that he cried at his negligence.

After the cutting off of their food-supply, there were no more attacks. The Moros felt sure of their victims, and they were experts enough in forms of torture to be satisfied with that which the white men were suffering. But they kept up their attempts to burn the flag. It seemed as though they knew that when the dying men failed to rise at that summons, they would be dead.

So it went on until the relief came. The Moros had not taken into account the grapevine telegraph of secretly friendly natives established by the American troops. Across two hundred miles of sullenly threatening country Lieutenant Williams, informed of the flying and attacked standard, brought his command by forced marches. The Moros scattered at his coming, and when the horsemen arrived at Dead Man's Rock they found only three men that gibbered weakly, bereft of reason and almost of life, and a flag so pierced with arrows, so charred and blackened, that at first he did not know it for a flag.

Lieutenant Williams was known as "Fighting Dick" among his men, from trumpeter to top sergeant, which fact more than hints at his character. He was a roaring, two-fisted leader of red-blooded men, whose principal god was courage and whose only passion was his love for a game fight. And in the grim records around and upon that long-beleaguered rock he read enough that pleased him to almost counterbalance his memory of other things.

It was on the fourth night of the return to his post that he approached his prisoners. They had recovered strength and sanity by now, and were lying under guard staring into the blackness, seeing limned against it, perhaps, the stone walls and iron bars of Alcatraz.

He talked a long while in a roundabout way, but got no sign of repentance from them. They even jested with seeming cheerfulness of their coming court-martial for desertion, imprisonment, and the dishonorable discharge that they saw at the end of it all.

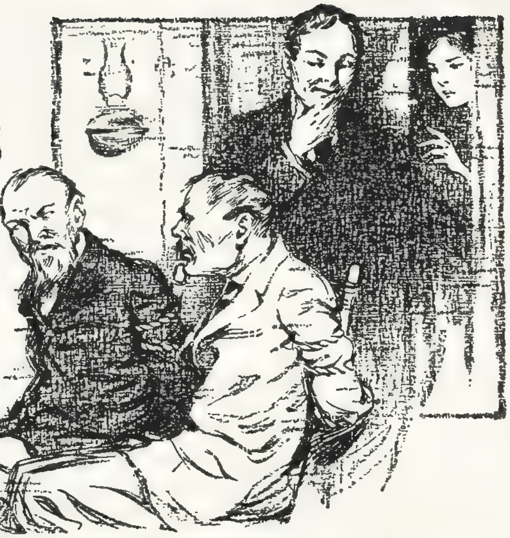
"I'm sorry," he said at the last. "I could use men like you—the service could, I mean—and I could probably get you off with short terms and restored to duty. But it's no use. Loyalty comes before courage, after all. And you'd never learn to serve the flag. You're ——"

Then Sheehy, who had been growing restive, forgot shame, and flashed out in a burst of indignant anger the spirit that had come to the three of them.

"The flag, ye say! Serve the flag! Why, what t' —— d'ye think we were fightin' for, tell me that?"

The Adventures of a Misfit

by William H. Hamby



Author of "The Harp on a Barbed-Wire Fence."

DUNCAN KENNISH had a good fire going and was thanking his luck for having stumbled upon the deserted cabin before dark, when the door pushed open and a man walked in.

"Good evening," said Kennish.

The newcomer nodded, and walked to the hearth where he held his hands to the blaze. He was cold, for the drizzling rain outside was almost sleet. Directly he turned his back to the fire, and while the steam arose from his wet trouser legs, stood watching Kennish prepare two quails for roasting.

"You own this cabin?" asked Kennish.

"N-o!" he shook his head emphatically—and then smiled. "Do I look like a man who owns anything like this?"

"No," replied Kennish, picking feathers from a bird, "but you acted like it."

"I act like lots of things that I am not," said the young man seriously. He was not more than twenty-three or four, with brown eyes and hair thick and a little wavy at the end. "Sometimes I act like thunder—but I never am."

"Sometimes," he gave his right hand a little airy wave, "I act like a millionaire, but I never am. Sometimes I act like I knew a lot, but I seldom do." The smile came again. "Only one thing I act like that I really am—and that is a double-dyed triple-plated fool."

"Make yourself at home," Kennish returned the grin. "You are among friends."

Kennish felt that way. For four months he had been baffled by what the department thought was the simplest sort of a case; and the four months' delay had cost three men their lives.

"Thanks," the young man stepped forward and extended his hand. "My name is Simplex Cox."

Kennish rubbed the feathers from his hand and reached up:

"And mine is John Paul Smith," he said, looking scrutinizingly into the whimsical, boyish face.

They sat on a chunk of wood before the fire and ate roasted quail.

"You live around here?" asked Kennish.

"No," replied Simplex Cox, "I don't live anywhere—I teach school. That is why I was out in this rain—trying to walk off the blues."

Kennish scrutinized him again, even more closely.

"You look less like a school-teacher than any person I ever saw," he said dubiously.

"I guess I am less like one." Simplex sighed heavily and shook his head at the fire. "That is what old Buck Whitaker says, and old Buck is President of the school board."

Then, after a moment of moody thought, he looked up, real distress upon his face.

"But in Heaven's name what do I look like? You see," he went on, confessingly, "I've got the raveled ends of about thirty abilities, but I can't knit them into any sort of a rope that will lasso a board-paying job. I've tried half a dozen things, and every time I am about to get a start some fool manager or director comes along and hands me my resignation.

"I thought I'd just hit the golden apple of success with this school. I thought as much of the kids as if they were long-lost cousins just home for Thanksgiving, and they took to me like grasshoppers to a patch of weeds.

"Then old Buck and some of them began to raise this thundering row about 'dis-cip-line' and 'larnin' their books.' "

"What was it about?" Kennish was smiling now, thoroughly convinced.

"Oh, one thing," Simplex shrugged his left shoulder, "we got into an interesting game of baseball one day at noon, and forgot to 'take up books' until half-past two. And one rainy day we quit work and popped corn on the stove, and played leap-frog over the seats. The kids liked it fine but old Buck happened to walk in—he's always nosin' around, the pizen old varmint—and raised the devil."

"But are the pupils really learning?"

"Learning?" Simplex looked up in astonishment. "Why they have learned more in three months than they ever learned before in their lives. They have gone through two or three sets of books already and have a good working knowledge of the Universe.

"And it is funny to me," Simplex concluded, "why old Buck can't see it. His daughter Sylvia is the brightest one in school. She's eighteen. I've taken her through three histories, two geographies, one rhetoric, and a half dozen books on English since September. That girl's a wonder—and doesn't look any more like old Buck than a wild daisy looks like a hedge-hog."

Kennish nodded and smiled to himself.

"You really want to stay with the school then?"

"Want to? I have to. I tell you I am no pampered son of a turnip trust. I have to earn my board by the sweat of my breath. I have to have some sort of a talking job. I've tried the muscular kind, but always break something."

"If old Buck is the main trouble can't you eliminate him some way? Can't you get around him? What sort of a fellow is he?"

"He is the sort of a fellow that every time you look at him you want to massage his mouth with the heel of your shoe."

"Big man?"

"Not so very, but he's ugly. To hear him talk about the necessity of *discipline* makes one sicker than ipecac. If the devil had been born in Tennessee and raised in Missouri you would take him and Buck for twins. And Buck's hired man would do for a valet for both of them.

"I never can remember," Simplex shook his head, "that Sylvia is any kin to old Whitaker. She seems like—like a young cedar tree among a patch of knotty scrub oak."

It was ten o'clock when Simplex started toward the door.

"Are you going to let old Buck get you?" asked Kennish.

"Not—yet," said Simplex, fight in his tone. But as he turned his face back to the fire a look of despondency came into his brown eyes and touched the corners of his mouth.

"But my job seems a gentle goat. Almost anybody gets it who goes after it."

A moment later when a gust of wind shook the cold drops from overhanging limbs upon the cabin roof, the young man sighed and shook his head.

"It's a long ways between jobs, and walking isn't extra good now. I'll stick as long as I can—and when I leave they generally remember my departure."

Against the older man's protest he went out into the night.

II

SIMPLEX COX'S blues lasted until he came in sight of the schoolhouse on the hill, at eight the next morning. He began to grin. He remembered something to tell the kids. Queer as it was, he had enjoyed this three months' school teaching. He liked these hill boys and girls immensely. They were smart, and it was fun to teach them.

He suspected that he had not been doing it according to Pedagogical Hoyles. Somewhere he dimly remembered reading a hundred or two "must not's" that were supposed to be tied in the cracker of the educational whip. Pupils must not whisper, must not write notes, leave their seats, climb trees, be tardy, etc. Well, anyway, he liked the kids and the "nots" never bothered him—or them.

There was a wild shout on the hill at the sight of him; and twenty boys tore down the road; a bunch of girls followed a little way behind.

"Hello Curly," the big boy, Tom Wallace, in the lead of the gang called familiarly to the teacher. "I got it now."

"Have?" Simplex grinned skeptically, and set down his dinner-bucket. "Let's see if you have."

Tom, two inches taller, and ten pounds heavier than Simplex, squared himself and put up his fists and grinned.

Quick as the leap of a squirrel, Simplex shot up his left hand and tapped him soundly on the chest. Then laughed joyfully at Tom's plagued blush.

The other boys yelled with delight. The wrestling and boxing bouts between Tom and the teacher were more enjoyed than arithmetic and grammar. And, odd beyond belief, they cheered most lustily when the teacher got the best of it. This was part of the accusation that Buck Whitaker, president of the board, was bringing against Cox.

When school was called and all of the forty-six pupils, ranging from five to twenty-five, were hard at work, each in his own way, but all at work, Simplex looked down upon them from his desk on the platform in front. Knotty, and unkempt, rough and homely, uncouth, untrained most of them were, yet there was stuff in them and he liked them.

Down the side aisle to the left his glance slipped cautiously and stopped at a girl of eighteen; very blue eyes, very fair skin, hair a bright brown, a tender wistful mouth.

Her head bent gracefully, eagerly, over Tennyson's "Princess." Something unusually beautiful stirred her—made her lift her eyes very shyly, eagerly—and they met Simplex's. Just for a finite second, but an infinite emotion, they looked at each other. She blushed deeply and bent her head farther over the book, and he called the second reader class.

When school was dismissed at four o'clock, Simplex stayed at his desk to grade some papers, or pretend to grade them. He seldom read them. When the pupils were all gone and the halloas and shouts lost down the hillside a quick light step entered the door. He looked up. It was Sylvia Whitaker.

"I forgot my rhetoric," she said.

Not meeting his eyes she went to her desk hurriedly.

"I'm going down your way to the forks of the road," he remarked casually getting his hat and overcoat.

The rain of the night before was now frozen on the trees. The sun near setting lit a million dazzling ice flames in the woods.

They talked of palaces and princesses and everything else but themselves for five minutes or more. And then a few minutes of silence as they walked along the narrow woods road with the tree limbs bending over with diamonds.

"Aren't books wonderful?" she looked up at him slyly, her face flushed. "I never read any real books until you came, Mr. Cox."

He said something irrelevant; a moment more of silence—the crackle of ice as the wind shook the woods.

"I hope they won't—I hope they won't—I hope—" she stammered getting redder and redder and looking away off over the valleys. "I hope you'll——"

"I do too," he said earnestly.

ON THE ridge above Whitaker's house, Buck was chopping wood. Up through the timber with gun under arm came Mel Shoup, his hired man.

Buck stuck the ax in the log and reached into his hip-pocket for a plug of tobacco. He was a man of fifty; looked as if he had found 'most everything that had come his way evil, and hoped the rest would be worse, so he could curse it.

"Well, you're gone a —— long time," was his greeting.

"I went down the river," Mel sat down on the log and rested the gun across his knee as though tired. He had a muddy eye and a wolfish mouth.

"Learn anything?"

Mel nodded.

"He went to see a feller in the cabin last night."

Buck rubbed the knuckles of his right hand and his face worked.

" —— it. I knowed he wa'n't no schoolteacher. It's your job to see to him."

Mel scowled and chewed the corner of his loose lip. Then he lifted his head, his mouth opened. He was listening. Through the icy woods had come a laugh, a merry, tinkling laugh from somewhere down the ridge.

He turned his head slowly and looked at old Whitaker, and in Whitaker's face was a look even Mel dreaded.

III

KENNISH had stayed in the cabin at Sumac ridge. He had found his very first clue. It might not be a clue, but it was the first thing that looked like one.

Not a stick of government cedar had been cut for two miles up and down the river. It was the first place he had found where there had been absolutely no stealing from government land.

It looked suspicious. He believed the leader, the man he was after, lived near.

When Kennish was first sent two years ago to stop the timber stealing along White River in the Missouri Ozarks, and in Arkansas, it appeared an easy job.

It was easy to catch the men who had been cutting cedar poles—the most valuable timber being stolen. At Benton Bluff, and Wall Springs, at Tyler Cove, they had caught the wood-choppers like sheep. Ignorant fellows for the most part, who scarcely knew what their offence was. The officers had worked in pairs and met with no dangerous resistance.

But at each place, after the arrest was made, an officer was killed.

Three officers had lost their lives, shot from ambush, and another been badly wounded. And yet not a clue as to who committed the murders.

Kennish was convinced that it was not the ignorant fellows involved in the cutting, or their relatives. It was somebody at the head of the whole thing, somebody in the background of respectability. The killing had been done to scare other officers.

This time Kennish came alone. He was not going to be responsible for any more of his men being killed. He would take the risk himself.

All day he had been shooting rabbits—and hunting bigger game. Near sundown he started to return. As he crossed the ridge, running east and west, he heard voices and waited in a screen of underbrush to see who was passing.

It was a girl's voice he heard first, a voice of silvery echoes in the icy woods. And then a laugh, a soaring, rollicking forgetful laugh. It was Simplex Cox, the misfit.

Kennish watched them down the road. They had passed the discussion of immortal problems, of poetry and life, and were attempting to put icicles down each other's backs. Kennish forgetting his grim quest, and danger and everything, smiled.

When Kennish had gone a short distance, something else in the woods caught his eye. It was a man with a gun, standing quite still, watching the young lovers from behind a screen of brush.

Kennish shot a rabbit—imaginary rabbit. The fellow jumped, looked around furtively, and started off in the opposite direction yodeling in a high raucous voice a hill-song about Davy Crockett.

Kennish went on with an uneasy sense of fatality hanging over the woods. The sun was down. The ice was no longer glittering diamonds—it was red.

The next morning, Kennish met Simplex Cox in the road at the foot of the schoolhouse hill.

"By the way, who is Buck's hired man?"

"Mel—something," answered Simplex.

"If I were you," advised Kennish, "I would have no trouble with him."

"Trouble with him?" Simplex's brown eyes opened in reproof. "Why, man, I never have any trouble with anybody. I'm so peaceable the lion and the lamb could eat cold peas and porridge off my chest."

* * *

FOR two weeks, Kennish stayed in the vicinity, always wary and alert, deepening his suspicion but getting no tangible evidence upon which to convict a man of murder.

Twice he had met Simplex Cox and saw shadows of bad luck deepening upon his mobile face. The teacher was fighting old Buck with all his resources, wit, ridicule, lovableness. And every time he got the best of the old muddler, Whitaker got more and more bitter. Yet Simplex was dogged by the fatality of losing his job—everything ended, and this would too.

Somehow, he felt he was created a misfit. He was doomed to fail at everything he undertook. Old Buck was pushing his fight so vindictively that in spite of Simplex's marvelous popularity with the pupils the board would reluctantly ask him to resign at the end of the month. Simplex was sure of that. And to celebrate the event he and the older pupils were getting up a big entertainment, a country exhibition for the last Friday night in January.

Late Friday evening, Kennish was down under the bluff by the river. It was a murky Winter night. Scarcely enough light to make visible the cold swift water of the yet unfrozen stream.

He was watching—as he had night after night—for some outside clue—something to connect up his suspicions. But if the head of all the timber thieves, the murderer of the officers, lived near here he was wary, exceedingly wary. No one came and went, at least he had seen no one. There were marks here—had been twice where a boat had landed on the gravel under the bluff—but nothing more.

For two weeks his depression had clung to him. It deepened with the continued uneventfulness of the dark Winter days. The woods were so still, the country so peaceable. Not a move or outbreak from anywhere at all suspicious. And yet, there hung around him all day, and crept closen at night, a sinister feeling of danger.

In the shelter of the rock, Kennish crouched and waited. The bluff broke most of the storm, but the icy wind whipped around under the sheltering rocks and found him out. It was mighty uncomfortable and looked fruitless. He had watched four nights and nothing came of it. He was almost ready to give it up and go to the cabin fire when on the dim surface of the running stream an object showed darker than the water. And there was the splash of a paddle.

Kennish had his gun ready.

The boat ground upon the gravel. The boatman jumped out and stooped to pull the end of the boat securely up on the bank. He was not ten feet away.

Just as he raised up, Kennish stepped out from the rock.

"Hands up!"

The fellow obeyed.

In a minute Kennish had him handcuffed.

He took him up a narrow steep path to the top of the bluff, led him close to the edge of the rock. Below two hundred feet the cold hurrying river swashed and whined and gurgled at the rocks. Across the dark heavens raced and scurried darker clouds. The wind moaned and screamed through the woods around them and back of them.

"When a man commits murder," began Kennish in a voice that sent shivers through his prisoner, "he pays the penalty."

"I didn't do it, before God I swear I did not," the fellow whined wailingly, already shaken, broken. "I didn't kill either one of them."

"They said you did. They both confessed they were into it, but said you did the shooting."

"Who said that?" the prisoner's teeth were chattering.

Kennish glared at him and spoke the names.

"They lied," said the prisoner, "they lied. They done it themselves. I saw 'em—I didn't shoot a single time."

"Well, we'll see. If you can prove that, we'll let you live." He started with him toward the cabin.

"Did——"

The prisoner hesitated.

"Did what?" Kennish caught him by the shoulder and swung him around, his face close to in the dark. "Did what?"

"Did—did they get your partner before you arrested them?"

"My partner?"

"Yes. They were going to get your partner—that fellow you got teaching school up here. They were going to kill him at the exhibition tonight."

"No," replied Kennish. "They did not get him. Step up there quick, I'm getting cold."

It was risky to take his prisoner into the lighted cabin; risky to leave him tied there; risky to go out into the darkness. It was a risky night. But the risks were taken swiftly and with scarcely a thought.

It was half-past nine. If he was not already too late, there was not a minute to lose. Country entertainments were over early. They would waylay Simplex on the road home, or they would shoot him in the confusion of the crowd. He might already be too late.

Kennish closed his teeth in the face of the cutting north wind and ran.

IV

THE grim coolness that had carried Kennish through many a close place deserted him utterly as he hurried through the darkness toward the school-house, two miles over the hills.

The thought of Simplex Cox, that light-hearted, irresponsible-tragic youth, being killed from ambush, or shot on the platform, murdered as his associate, maddened him.

He stopped to get his breath and lighted a match. It was forty minutes after nine. Already the entertainment was out perhaps. Directly there would be the sound of horse hoofs on the road, laughter and shouts along the hills, and then off somewhere down that long dark ridge, the crack of a rifle!

Kennish ran once more. Ran until at the foot of the schoolhouse hill, he was gasping for breath. Up the road a hundred yards and he felt a choking relief. The entertainment was not over. Streaks of light from the windows fell on the woods that crowded close upon the little schoolhouse.

Kennish slowed up and got his breath, and began to plan. He must observe some caution. He went into the woods and skirted toward the rear of the schoolhouse. He would keep under cover until he could get Simplex away. Then he'd get word during the night to his fellow officers below. It would take strong, brave help to arrest these murderers.

A window at the back of the schoolhouse opened. A man leaped out. Two others followed, and all of them ran. At the edge of the woods they scattered.

Inside the schoolhouse an uproar broke out.

Kennish, still a hundred yards away, ran for the schoolhouse, straight for the door.

What had happened?

If you can not see the face, laughter sounds like crying, and shouts like screams for help.

But at the door Kennish perceived the outbreak was of fun, the shouting, the stamping, the guffawing, the howling was at some horse-play upon the stage.

Kennish pressed his way inside the door. The schoolhouse was crowded. Fifty men and boys stood jammed along the back wall. They were shouting and yowling and slapping each other on the backs.

At the far end of the schoolroom was a small board platform four feet high for a stage. Muslin curtains that slipped on a wire served to open and close the scene, and one end of the stage was cut off by other curtains for a dressing-room.

The curtains were parted. On the stage were two men, tied to their chairs and gagged. They were writhing and kicking and struggling and gurgling.

"What is it?" Kennish asked sharply of a young man at his side. The hill Billy choked back his glee long enough to answer:

"It's one of the plays. A stage hold-up or something of that kind. Curly—that's the 'Prof.'—and Tom and three or four other big boys are putting it on.

"They needed some help a while ago and called on the president of the board—Old Buck—and Mel to come up and take part. They went kind of dubious but the crowd egged 'em on.

This is the first act.

Out of the door slipped Kennish and dashed around the house.

The back window opening into the small curtained dressing-room was still open. He caught the sill, leaped up and scrambled in.

It was empty—everybody gone but one girl, standing by the window. She did not start or seem surprised at his entrance. It was Sylvia Whitaker.

"What is it?" he asked. "Where is Cox?"

A smile came into her disconsolate face.

"He's gone," she spoke almost in a whisper which the outbreaks of merriment made unnecessary. "He did it for revenge. He got Whitaker and Mel up here to take part, and pretended they must tie them—and they are really tied." She could not keep back a gurgle. "The crowd thinks they are playing but they are trying their best to get loose. They are actually tied and gagged, and Simplex—Mr. Cox—and the boys all skipped out."

Kennish could not resist a chuckle himself. It *was* revenge. They would perhaps struggle there a quarter of an hour yet and the crowd delight at their fine acting as they grew more and more desperate.

"Tell me," Kennish felt a sudden great pity for the girl—"You called him Whitaker—isn't Buck your father?"

She shook her head violently.

"No—indeed! He's only my stepfather, and——"

She did not finish.

"I am going to take a little part in the play," said Kennish. "When I give you the sign will you come out and close the curtain?"

Kennish walked on to the stage. The crowd got still. This was the second part of the play.

He slipped a handcuff on Buck's right wrist, cut the cord loose, twisted his arm back and handcuffed the other wrist to it. Mel was likewise handcuffed, the gags being left on.

The two glared and wrenched and lunged. The crowd broke out afresh with shouts and cheers.

"Close the curtain," he ordered.

Leaving the prisoners a moment still gagged, he led the girl back behind the partition curtain.

"You and your mother own the farm?" he asked.

"Yes," she looked at him curiously, "why?"

"I guessed so," he said. Then added: "You won't be bothered by your stepfather and Mel any more. I'm an officer."

Astonishment crossed her face, and yet there was a gleam of joyful relief in her eyes.

"Too bad," said Kennish, "that Simplex left. He could stay on now as long as he wished."

Two quick tears slipped down her cheek.

"Maybe—maybe he'll come back—sometime."

"Maybe so," said Kennish, "but he'll be a long way from here before daylight.

"Good heavens!" Kennish felt fairly weak. "Think of that infant tying up those two desperadoes. Anyway, if I can find him, he'll get half the reward." Then he smiled grimly, remembering Simplex's threat as he took charge of his prisoners. "Yes, they got rid of him, but they'll remember his going all right."

STEPPIN' ON THE THROTTLE OF A MOUNTAIN STAGE

by STANLEY R. HOFFLUND

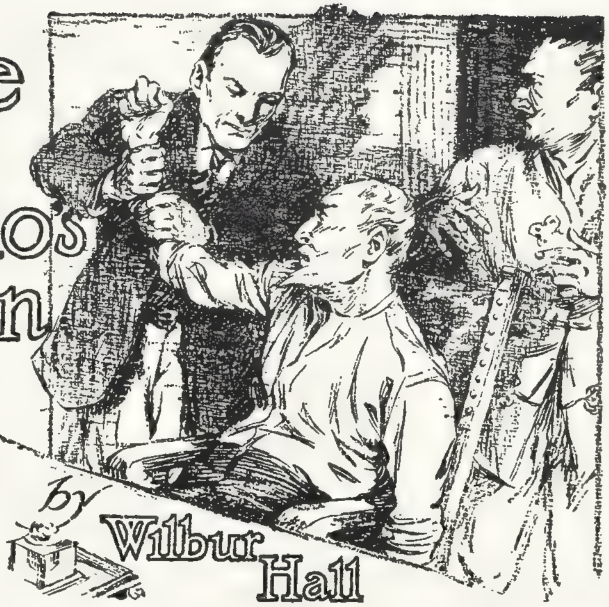
STEPPIN' on the throttle of a mountain stage
Ain't a life that's sure to terminate in ripe old age.
There ain't no nerves of steel the mountain rains can't rust,
And the biggest lungs will crumble breathin' desert dust.
The roads are always slipp'ry where they're narrow gage,
Steppin' on the throttle of a mountain stage.

In Winter, when each little creek's become a flood,
And the road's all washed away or two foot deep in mud,
You can't bust up the schedule just because it rains,
So you pound her through, a-trustin' God and luck and chains.
Where roads are gone you build your own, out through the sage,
Steppin' on the throttle of a mountain stage.

The passengers are mad and wet and scared and cold
From pilin' out and pushin' where the chains won't hold.
They paid their fare to ride, it makes 'em cuss their luck,
Shovin' through the quicksand when the car gets stuck.
If they don't help, they won't arrive; don't mind their rage,
Steppin' on the throttle of a mountain stage.

There ain't a bridge left standin', and the ten-mile grade
Won't hold the surest-footed goat God ever made;
But get her through you must, so grip your wheel and grin.
Open wide the throttle when the wheels sink in!
She may skid clean through the bars of this here mortal cage
And land you at the throttle of a hotter stage.

Billy June and Padre Paolo's Revolution



by Wilbur Hall

Author of "Billy June and the Man Going Out," etc.

IT IS difficult for me to realize that it was just three weeks ago that I sat with Billy June, the South American "trouble shooter," in a café in Rio de Janeiro, and consented to chuck up work for a time and go with him to learn the truth in regard to Padre Paolo's revolution in one of the northern states of Brazil.

It does not seem possible, as I review the events just passed, that the political crisis of a great state could be met and decided in that length of time. It does not seem possible that I myself could have gone through with what I have. Nevertheless, it has been but three weeks—to be exact, but twenty days.

In that period I have become intimately acquainted with the most remarkable man in South America—this same Padre Paolo. I have been near death twenty times; so often, in fact, that in the end I became accustomed to the sensation and learned to laugh at danger.

I have seen Billy June save himself from being publicly shot in front of a blank wall, and save himself by a ruse so clever as to leave me gasping, yet following that by a bold stroke that sent a proud governor to his knees and consummated the work of the revolting forces in the state. I have seen a smart army corps defeated by five words and its officers put to complete rout without the shedding of a drop of blood. I have seen an entire state government overthrown with a crash.

But what I have seen and known of the motives and the conspiracies underlying all this action has been even greater in extent—enough to fill the book that Billy June says I am going to write some day concerning all this serio-comic event.

If you remember, by chance, the story of how Billy June prevented the flight of Joseph McAlpin from Goyaz and saved Senhor de Barossa in the Amazon railroad scandal you may remember that June used me—Edmund Doag—at that time. My part was a small one, in spite of things Billy was extravagant enough to say about it, but it had important results for me.

I had known him for a long time, but that experience made us intimate friends and when he sent for me three weeks ago I was ready to take any long chance if I could join him in one of his constantly recurring adventures as an adjuster of difficulties large and small in South America. It was his success in such enterprises that had earned him his name "the South American trouble shooter" and I knew that where Billy went there would be excitement enough to satisfy the most venturesome.

There was, however, a certain senhorita to consider. And we were awaiting the time, not far distant, we hoped, when we might be married. So it was only after I had faithfully promised to avoid danger that she told me I might go—if, as I assured her, it would be only for a short time.

In his irritatingly slow fashion he came to the point about the time our coffee was served.

"Now, Doag," Billy said, deliberately twisting the end of one of his everlasting brown-paper cigarets, "I'd like to give you an idea of what the situation is in Padre Paolo's country. Don't accelerate me too much, will you? But give me time. All right. You've heard of the padre?"

"In a general way. I know the name."

"That isn't enough. Padre Paolo is the smartest man in Brazil—maybe in the continent. He was a Portuguese priest, but he got to be pretty strong in the country up north here, and when he had a row with some church dignitaries and was kicked out, he defied the church. You've been here long enough to know that that is some undertaking for a lone man."

"I can see that, Billy."

"Good. Padre Paolo is the first priest I ever heard of to get away with it. He isn't so much a priest, as far as his people up there are concerned—he's a god. I have a notion that he runs the state, in his quiet, roundabout way, but I couldn't prove it and don't want to. That's neither here nor there. The point is that the padre is the whole works in that particular region."

I thought I saw a light.

"And the government here in Rio is getting jealous, is that it, June?" I asked.

Billy waved a big hand.

"Don't hustle me along so fast, now, and get my mechanical processes all gummed up. Take your time. The government isn't jealous—not yet. But, naturally I guess, the government here wants to know whether Padre Paolo is for it or against it."

"And you're going up to find out?"

Billy sat looking at the end of his cigaret. After a long pause he drawled—

"Well, now, I won't go so far as to say that—because I already know."

"Oh."

"Yes—oh! But there's another horn of the dilemma, as they say in novels. I'm really on the other horn. Want to get on with me?"

"That's what I'm sitting around here in the fidgets for, instead of being out in the other room beating Max Eaton at balkline," I said a little impatiently.

"There, there, now," Billy soothed. "Don't get all heated up. You know I don't think very fast, Doag, and you quick guys have to stall around and wait for me if you want to finish when I do—see? But I'll try to speed up. The story is this:

"Padre Paolo is about to kick up a whale of a row in the state I'm talking about because the governor is unpopular and hasn't been playing a straight fifty-fifty game with the priest. In other words, there's a revolution brewing and the *goberno* here in Rio wants some inside dope. I don't mind telling you that it won't be any safer for you and me in the state, if the revolution breaks while we're there, than a small boy would be trying to get honey out of a beehive without a face mask. Personally, I don't know how popular I may be with either party, and both of 'em may misunderstand my motives. Do you still want to go?"

"Yes," I answered promptly.

"And take a chance on throwing the long shadow on an adobe wall some morning early?"

"I'll take that chance," I said. "We'll be taking it together, won't we?"

Billy laughed.

"We'll be taking it together, but your face isn't as easy to remember as mine, Doag. You'll have enough less danger than I will to make it interesting for you to watch me. I just wanted you to know how the ground lay. We'll start on the eleven o'clock boat tonight—and we go steerage."

IT'S going to be difficult to compress into a tale of decent length the story of this expedition into Padre Paolo's country, and details will have to go overboard like the deck-load in a Pacific storm. If I get to the book Billy June is always talking about I'll be able to give a chapter or so to the remarkable adventure we had going up, when we bumped into Senhor Alberto Costavel, and found a man down in the steerage called Miguel de Lima who looked enough like him to be his twin.

Billy June saved Senhor Costavel from assassination the second morning out, just before we reached our port, and that happening, with the coincidental discovery of his twin in the steerage played an important part in our experiences later. For Senhor Costavel was secretary to the governor of the state for which we were bound, and it was a fanatical friend of Padre Paolo's who tried to end his promising career on the promenade deck when Billy interfered. How we happened to be up on that deck instead of down where we belonged in the steerage is another part of the story that must be slighted.

Don't forget Senhor Alberto Costavel and his twin Miguel de Lima, though, because they will bob up again, and at a very critical minute.

Billy was pretty well acquainted in the capital of the state, which, because it was not that one, I am going to call Olivenca. That this was a disadvantage we discovered that morning, for five minutes after our arrival we were politely asked by two police officers to go to headquarters at once.

The politeness of those two men still remains fresh in my mind—it was punctuated with softly spoken threats of what would happen if we didn't go peaceably and promptly that were sufficient to curl your hair. We went.

The chief of the bureau was as polite as his men. He was sorry, but the times were unsettled and Senhor June was known to be from Rio, where plots hatch like eggs in a farmyard. Would the senhor graciously consent to tell why he had come to Olivenca, or would he return at once to Rio?

Billy rolled a cigaret. I think he will fail to pass muster at heaven's gate, when interrogated, if they don't let him roll a cigaret while he's getting ready to answer.

"Rio is very far from Olivenca, *Excellencia*," he drawled, when he was smoking. "We do not know everything that goes on. Senhor Doag and I came up to look at land northwest of here for clients of his. We have letters to a worthy priest, Padre Paolo——"

Before June had gotten the words out of his mouth I felt my heart sink. Little as he had told me of the situation I knew the name would arouse suspicion in Olivenca. And after what had occurred on the boat coming up——

The Chief of Police started, but he said nothing. Billy June appeared as guileless as a clover blossom. He went serenely on outlining a perfectly plausible program which he said would guide us while we were in the state, and ending with a careless question as to whether the chief knew any one in Olivenca who was familiar with the lands about the padre's region.

The officer pondered a moment, then he said smoothly:

"I must ask pardon for having detained you gentlemen. And I believe I can direct you to a man who knows Padre Paolo's territory thoroughly."

Inexperienced as I was I saw that the officer was making a little plan with which he expected to trap us. It seemed a waste of time to wonder whether June would see it. So I made my face a blank—something that is very easy for me to do, naturally—and waited.

The police chief excused himself and left the room. I was about to lean forward and ask Billy what he thought was underneath the officer's manner when I caught the slightest possible wink from my friend, followed by a barely perceptible shake of the head.

"How much do you guess Senhor Smeeth will be willing to pay for this land concession?" he asked idly.

I caught his cue.

"That I can't tell, any more than you can," I answered with a show of impatience. "I've told you so before."

"Oh, well," Billy said, grinning good-naturedly; "don't let's get all red in the face talking about it! I just thought maybe——"

The chief came back into the room, and the tail of my eye, as they say, was caught by the slight movement of a red hanging over a recess at one end of the place. Billy June had anticipated the police. They were spying on us.

We left in a few minutes with a card to a man whose name I have forgotten now, since it was unimportant, but who, the police official said, could tell us a great deal about Padre Paolo's territory. We lied, and the chief lied, about the pleasure we had had in meeting, and outside Billy June grinned at me.

"You take this address," he said, "and make an appointment for this evening to talk about land. I've got plenty to do in the next two or three hours, and you can't help any other way than this."

"What time will you be ready to meet this person?" I asked.

"Any time after six. I'll join you at the Central at five. If you have any spare time, unpack our trunks and look over both automatics. We may need 'em before midnight."

And with that he was gone.

I found the man to whom the police chief had given us a card, and we made an appointment for eight o'clock. He was a pleasant little man, and I am glad to say that he had nothing whatever to do with what happened in his office that evening. I doubt, in truth, that he ever knew of it, because he was not present, and—whatever subterfuge the police had used to keep him away—I am convinced he was ignorant of the motive behind.

At a few minutes past five Billy was in the room that I had engaged at the Central. He locked the door when he entered and drew a sort of lounge into the middle of the room, motioning me to sit down. What followed was spoken in an undertone that I'm certain defied all the clever espionage of the cleverest police outside the continent of Europe—the Brazilian *Servico Segredo* (secret service).

"I don't want you to be in the dark at all on this trip, Doag," Billy said to me in the beginning. "We're going to be in for some chances, and if anything happens to either of us the other has got to know what's what. In ten words, the governor of this state is suspected of graft that is running into millions of pounds."

"The governor?" I whispered.

"Just so. It's all suspicion with the Brazilian government so far. But this afternoon I've been with the superintendent of the British engineering firm in charge of the construction of a sanitary system for Olivenca. He's told me enough to show me where some of the leaks are."

"Who is paying for this sanitary system?" I asked.

"The Brazilian government is standing half. Thus far the company has only received about four per cent. of the money that has been sent up from the national treasury. The rest has disappeared."

"Is it very much?"

"About fifteen thousand pounds sterling. But that is only a bagatelle. He has shown me the evidence they hold that customs collected from them on materials shipped into Olivenca from the States and England have never been reported at all to Rio de Janeiro. Also the customs have been raised by the governor about sixty per cent."

"Those customs invoices ought to show," I began.

"They've probably been destroyed," June said. "On the street I ran into an old-timer here who says that taxes have gone up as much as customs duties, but that almost nothing is being spent for the operation of the state government. It looks now like wholesale looting."

"Does Padre Paolo come in on this anywhere?" I asked.

"Padre Paolo supported the present governor when he was a candidate. But it is common talk on the street that the priest is now about ready to put an opposition candidate into the field. If he doesn't win in the regular elections—well, that's anticipating trouble. It's going to be a pretty little mess either way, because the governor won't let go his hold on the treasury without a fight."

"Why the devil did you use the padre's name this morning, then?" I queried testily.

Billy June laughed aloud.

"Because I wanted to arrange this little meeting tonight. Come on, let's eat, and then we'll see what we'll see."

I PUT my automatic in my hip-holster, but Billy June slid his into his belt with the butt concealed by his loose vest. I knew that he was almost never without an old "police positive" that had been given him in Texas by some admirer, and his automatic, I realized, was an extra precaution. His apprehension of trouble was so definite to me that I confess I didn't enjoy my meal in the hotel dining-room as much as I might otherwise have done.

At a few minutes before eight we were ascending the stairs of the old office building where we were engaged to meet my pleasant little acquaintance of the forenoon.

There was a long hall at the head of the stairs, with office doors on either hand, and it was quite dark. In fact, I struck a match when we were well down the corridor, to identify the room in which I had made the appointment.

I was looking for the enameled disk bearing the number, when Billy June leaped for my hand and extinguished the match. I caught my breath and turned toward him, and then I saw, dimly outlined against the vague light in the stairway opening, the figures of several men. June had heard them approaching and snuffed the match just in time.

June gripped my shoulder warningly, pulled out his keys, deftly fitted a "master" into the keyhole of the door across the hall, opened the door, and pulled me in. I can't tell you how swiftly he moved—more swiftly than I would have thought possible, knowing his usual hesitant, drawling style. He closed the door when we were within and stood with his ear against it, waiting.

There was no attempt made, as soon as the persons outside had found that we were not in the room in which we had the appointment, to secure secrecy. In Portuguese we heard a voice of authority giving orders for the disposition of the men in the room across the hall, and it was perfectly plain that they were preparing an ambuscade against our coming. After a minute or so the opposite door was closed.

June turned his head and put his lips against my ear.

"We'll have to take a chance on the gang being all inside, over there. If they see us come from here, tell them we mistook the room. When we get in there, keep your back to a wall. But don't move till they do."

My heart was beating fast as June boldly swung the door back.

"We've the wrong room, Doag," he said easily. "Let's try here." And he stepped across and knocked sharply at the opposite door.

It was thrown open at once and a flood of light streamed out. A heavy-set man with a rather evil countenance invited us in. We entered. As far as was observable we were alone with our beetle-browed friend.

"What is it, senhores?" he asked raspily.

"We seek information in regard to lands in the territory where a certain Padre Paolo lives," June said. "We were to get that information here, according to appointment."

The heavy-faced man glared.

"You will get no information Senhor June," he barked abruptly. "I have to ask you to accompany me to the headquarters of the state secret service."

Billy June stepped forward abruptly. I laid my back to the door, which was closed by my weight, and dropped my right hand into my coat pocket. The challenge had come sooner than I had expected.

June showed sudden anger.

"See here, Senhor whoever-you-are!" he cried. "We've been to headquarters once today, without any reason, and we've been dogged around the city since we left our boat this morning. We require some explanation!"

"You shall have it," the Brazilian answered, and stamped heavily on the floor.

I saw two things at once, it seemed to me. One was the instant appearance of three men in the room from hiding places behind a desk, in a closet, and in a curtained window embrasure, respectively. The other was a quick jerk of Billy June's right arm upward, with his heavy police revolver in his fist, and its descent on the head of the big man who had admitted us. He fell like a polled ox.

"Drop a gun on 'em, Doag!" June cried to me, and before the trio could reach for their weapons we had ours on them.

I never saw three faces express a more uniform or a deeper surprise.

But June was not playing for their surprise. He touched the stunned man on the floor with one foot.

"Drag this hulk into the other room, Doag!" he snapped. "I'll be with you in a jiffy."

Still watching the others, I jerked the door open, reached down, got a firm hold in the big man's coat collar and began backing out. June waited until I was halfway into the hall, then he stepped forward, coolly, and began searching his three prisoners. He was taking a desperate chance, but the man who holds a gun and moves fast always has the advantage. Before I closed the opposite door, with my big prisoner safely inside, I saw Billy return to his door, always facing his trio.

"You men stand where you are!" he said to them sharply. "I'll need you again." And with that he backed over to me. "Take his gun and all his papers from your friend on the floor, and do it quick," he said, and in a moment I had emptied the pockets of the unconscious man, dropped his possessions into a lawyer's portfolio that was on a near-by desk, and straightened up.

"Ready, Billy," I said in English.

"Good work," he replied. "Now lock the hippopotamus in."

I did this, and put Billy's key-ring into his coat pocket. Together we stepped across the narrow hallway into the room with the three disgruntled Brazilians.

Billy June looked at them keenly. Then he addressed one—a small, wiry man, with close-cropped black mustache.

"You're Capitao Meldano, I believe," he said pleasantly.

The man shrugged.

"Oh, there's no use in being disagreeable about it," June said. "If we hadn't bagged you, you would have bagged us, you know. I want you to come along. I'm going to leave Doag outside, and if he sees a head out of this door or the one across the hall he's going to shoot and shoot to kill. Come on, capitao!"

The man hung on his heel a moment. Instantly one of those rare flashes of temper Billy June shows blazed up in him. With two long strides he reached the little police captain, and with one jerk he sent him spinning out of the door with such velocity that his head struck resoundingly against the hallway wall.

"Don't fool with me!" Billy cried, with an oath, and banged the door on the other two. As it closed he whispered to me: "You're supposed to be here watching. Don't make a sound."

I caught his meaning and tiptoed cautiously toward the stairs. He and his victim followed me, and their footfalls echoed noisily in the bare corridor. We reached the street hastily and there, one on either side of Capitao Meldano, we moved away.

Billy spoke in English.

"This Meldano is an attaché of the governor's," he said hastily. "I judge that I have about twenty minutes in which to accomplish something important at the governor's palace. I can get in with this man—I'm afraid three of us would cause questions. I want you to go to the corner of the second street east. There you'll find an automobile driven by a young Englishman with spectacles. Name is Dwight. He knows Olivenca well. Tell him to come to the governor's palace in fifteen minutes and to wait there *with his engine running*. Meantime you take a look at those papers you filched from the police official. Get that?"

"Easy."

"All right. If I don't come down from the governor's office by eight-thirty, the expedition for a while will be up to you. Drive like a fool to Padre Paolo—Dwight knows the roads—and tell him everything you know. The papers you carry will satisfy the padre."

"If you don't come!" I exclaimed. "If you don't come I'll go after you, Billy June."

June's voice broke.

"Confound it, Doag, a lot depends on this enterprise, and I'm running it. Don't waste any time. Do what I say."

"But how about you?" I queried stubbornly.

"Never mind about me!" he barked. "I'll be all right. I've been through tighter pinches than this too often. Will you obey orders?"

I looked Billy June in the eye.

"I'll obey orders," I said, gripped his arm, and turned into a side street at a trot.

It was nine days before I saw Billy June, instead of twenty minutes, and when I did he was in the "condemned cell" with three hours between him and the firing squad.

IT IS impossible, and, indeed, unnecessary, to put down here the adventures and thrill of that long ride when I carried the papers I had taken from the stunned police official to hand them over to a man whom I had never seen, but whose very name, by this time, was beginning to stand with me for power and a long political arm.

Dwight had opportunity, between the times when we were dodging pursuers and evading police sent out ahead of us through telegraphed orders, to tell me something of Padre Paolo, and I felt a liking for the man before I reached him. But meantime I had three close brushes with death, once when the big machine rocked on the edge of an embankment and very nearly went over, and twice with bullets. I am still nursing an ugly wound in my left shoulder that I received that night.

The long and short of my story as regards this ride is that the police we had left in the office building at a few minutes past eight had stirred up an angry nest of official hornets about me, and it was only due to the grit and skill of the little English driver that I got through at all.

What would have happened had I been captured, I don't know—but probably I would have been shot on the spot to avoid complications. Heaven knows the governor had given the police authority enough!

I learned this between one and two o'clock that morning in the study of Padre Paolo while he and I pored over the papers I had taken from our friend of the secret service. Billy June had been lucky again—the man he had snagged was a high official and evidently an incautious one, for he had carried letters giving many details of the governor's plans to control the coming elections, to hamper Padre Paolo, and to nip any possible revolution in the bud. There was also a warrant for the arrest of Billy June and myself, charges unnamed, and penciled on the back of the document were positive instructions to kill us if we resisted—and to give us plenty of chance to resist.

And now I must give you some idea of this padre who had, in turn, defied the church of Rome, the state of Olivenca, and the government of Brazil. He sat in a great canvas chair in a bathrobe, which he had thrown on over his loose night-shirt when my arrival had been announced and the importance of my mission made clear to him. His bare legs, long and thin, stuck out from beneath the robe. They gave one the impression of an attenuated and even emaciated figure, but beneath the plaid shoulders of that dressing-gown moved a pair of tremendous arms, set on the torso of a giant.

The padre's head was large, his neck strong and supple, his eyes piercing, and his smile the kindliest I had ever seen. I could readily understand that here was a man to move and hold others by sheer force of will, if necessary, but who was much more likely to win them through the heart. The combination made for leadership and domination; and that, as I learned full well, Padre Paolo had amazingly. Billy June had phrased it well—he was not considered as a priest by his people, but as a god.

The padre heard my story silently, although when I told him about Billy June's adventurous plan to break into the palace of the governor with a secret service man as shield or mask, or both, he summoned a nimble-fingered clerk, gave him a brief telegram in a Portuguese code, and bade him rush it. Then we turned to the papers.

He went through them carefully but with amazing speed. Then he turned to me.

"You say that you don't know why Senhor June sent you here?" he asked in a smooth, pleasant voice, touched with the sharpness of a man used to commanding.

"Nothing at all. June told me that you were threatening the power of the present governor because you were dissatisfied with the way he had run the state. He said the governor had been grafting."

I used the American word there, and the padre smiled. In excellent English he remarked:

"That is an eloquent word you people in the States have," he said. "Do you prefer to use English with me?"

I told him that it made no difference, and we used both from then forward, as our ideas required, or as our surroundings suggested.

When he waited for me I asked abruptly—

"Do you know why June sent me?"

He laughed shortly.

"If I hadn't heard of this 'trouble-shooter' I should think it a trap. As it is, I believe he felt that he could depend more on me than on any of the federal or state officers in Olivenca. I will tell you something that June doesn't know. But first let me assure you that my telegram will do all for your friend that can be done. I have men in confidential positions on the staff of Governor Francisco Valenzuela, and it is to my agents, who will communicate to them, that I have wired. There is nothing we can do for a few days, so that we will have to leave him to the care of our friends and of the good God."

He crossed himself reverently, but not ostentatiously, and I realized that the man was intensely religious, church or no church. Then he plunged into his story.

"I can give it to you but briefly tonight, for we have a big day ahead of us tomorrow and we must both rest. Governor Valenzuela has been stealing from the state, from the republic of Brazil and from his own poor people. He is a scoundrel, too evil to be hanged. In the States you say: 'hanging is too good for him.' That is what I mean. Now he knows that his political end is approaching. But he has a cousin—a personable young scamp named Chavez who has some following and whom he expects to make governor to succeed himself. Most of his family is already in office—the state is dominated by them—outside my little territory here."

He waved his hand modestly.

"My own people are his one anxiety. He knows that they will not only vote against him and work against him, but that they will fight if necessary to put him where he belongs and to break up his vicious family bureaucracy. That is coming—if he can not break my power first. Do you understand?"

I nodded.

"I've felt something like that, and Billy June did."

"All well. On the way up here from Rio your friend interfered to save the life of the governor's secretary. Ah, you are surprised that I know that! I know more. I know that the poor boy who tried to assassinate Senhor Costavel was demented—his father had lost all his land through the excessive tax burdens of the governor, and he was thinking to strike back. That action has precipitated things with me. I must move now sooner than I had planned. Because that lad proudly admitted that he was one of my friends, and he cried 'Death to Valenzuela! Live Padre Paolo!' Very foolish. Very wrong. Very unfortunate.

"You are wondering two things—first why your friend June's act in saving the governor's secretary did not redound to his benefit in Olivenca, and secondly what I propose doing. Quite right. The police were not concerned with the saving of young Alberto Costavel's life—spies in Rio had warned Governor Valenzuela of your coming, and he fears those who come from the capital. Oh, I assure you that there are wheels within wheels in this state, and that some of the cogs may be traced to Rio, as you shall find! Now for your second puzzle—what do I propose doing?"

He stood up suddenly, and I realized how big a man he was physically. I am not short, but he towered above me, and his voice took on the roll of thunder and his big hands clenched.

"I propose to move at once with a revolution. I have to choose between waiting in humiliation and sorrow while this scoundrel goes on looting the public treasury and grinding down my poor fellow Brazilians in this state, or striking a blow that will drive him and his family in disgrace from Olivenca forever. I am a man of peace—the pastor of a flock, although out of the church—but I can be a man of war when right is being spit upon. And it is now that I am that man of war!"

His wrath was terrible to see as he strode up and down the narrow study. The long skirt of his dressing-gown overturned a table and a chair, and his arms swung about like flails, but for a moment he was heedless of anything save the wrong of his people. Then, suddenly as it had come, the storm subsided.

"Go to bed, my son," he said. "Rest as well as you can. In the morning I will see where I can put you, if you want to stay with the movement until we can do something actively in behalf of your friend Billy June. Good-night. Good-night."

We shook hands warmly, I completely won by him. When I was undressing I paused for a second to wonder if he were just a skilful juggler with words and feelings and whether he really meant me well. But I dismissed the suspicion with a thought.

I was enlisted with Padre Paolo now, no matter what befell. He had won me as I was now certain he had won a following sufficient to make him the dread of the villain he had painted for me in the governor's palace in the uneasy city of Olivenca.

IN THE next three days Padre Paolo aroused the state of Olivenca with a flaming message disseminated by runners from among his own people, meantime completing a careful plan of attack in case Governor Valenzuela struck first.

That message was a remarkable document. It set forth tersely the charge against the governor, namely: That he had been elected from the class of working people and small land owners to insure them fair play in Olivenca, and that he had turned on them immediately; that he had established himself as emperor instead of governor; that he had stolen their funds and increased their taxes; that he had taken their land from them by fraud and given it to his favorites; that the best offices in the state were being mismanaged by his appointees, mainly members of his own family; and that he had abridged the legal rights of the citizens by arbitrary mandates. It demanded of all those who loved justice and were intolerant of tyranny to assemble, asserting that the lawful machinery of elections had been seized by the governor and was useless. And it named as meeting-place a town twenty miles from Olivenca, which I will call Serra Grande, and set the date for Friday, ten days later. It was boldly signed, "Padre Paolo."

Padre Paolo turned from a conference with the leaders of his people when I came in with one of these circulars in my hand.

"You disapprove?" he said sharply.

"It's none of my business," I retorted. "But it seems to me that you're giving your people over, bound and gagged, to the governor. If I were he I'd gobble them up as fast as they appeared at Serra Grande and put them in a stockade until the elections were over."

Several of the men in his cabinet smiled, as he did.

"Well determined," he said gently. "But you could not know that Serra Grande is not our meeting place at all—the real town for assembly is known to all our people."

I admitted that he had me and apologized.

"That is unnecessary," he replied. "Sit down with us—you are an engineer and we need you."

He introduced me in a word to the others. There were nine of them—plain people of the hill countries and the farms, but with bright eyes and firm mouths that indicated intelligence and forthrightness. I pulled up a chair and sat there listening. The planning went ahead, and on one or two matters of commissary and transportation I was able to make suggestions.

The program, in a word, was to take all the men from the padre's immediate neighborhood in a body to the meeting-place agreed upon, put the whole crowd there into the best order possible at short notice. and march on Olivenca. Agents already there were to assist, and the extent of their promises to the padre indicated to me not only that he had some powerful friends in the capital, but that he had been planning his coup for a long time.

At eleven o'clock the conference broke up, the order being that they would start on the second morning for the meeting-place. In the interim, the accumulation of supplies and the distribution of ammunition were to be attended to by the chiefs. I walked out with the padre and when we were alone I asked him a question that had been in my mind all the morning.

"How large an army have you, Padre Paolo?"

He answered quietly—

"Eighteen thousand men."

I gasped.

"Eighteen thousand? Where are they hidden?"

I hadn't seen a uniformed man in his town, nor on my road into it the night before.

The padre waved his hand with a sweeping gesture.

"They are all about you. This territory up here has eight thousand men, the rest of the state has ten thousand who are friendly to our movement. There are not twenty military men among them—but they are all soldiers."

"But uniforms—ammunition—guns?"

"Uniforms are made for parades. Every man in our party has a rifle and all the ammunition he can use. And they know how to handle a gun and shoot it, too. We are not an army for military purposes, but for the enforcement of the right."

I was silenced, but not convinced. A South American revolution is always an informal party, without order or tactics or training, to be sure, but I had never before heard of one that didn't have, for a nucleus, a large army faction within its body. I didn't doubt the padre, but I did begin to doubt the efficiency of his following.

I was in the midst of this sort of thought when a runner came up with sweat pouring from him and with legs badly torn by thorns. He gasped two or three phrases of Portuguese into the padre's ear, then fell in a faint. The big priest picked him up as if he were a child, before I could reach him, and jerked his head for me. As we walked towards the nearest building he snapped over his shoulder:

"The governor has moved first. They have blown up the only bridge across the wide river between us and Olivenca. Will you take charge of replacing it?"

Instantly I was wide awake.

"How far away is it?"

"About one hundred kilometers—seventy miles."

"Where will I get men and tools?"

The padre dropped his exhausted runner on a bench, where others took charge of him, and turned to me.

"I will start a dozen good men from here to work under your orders with my people. A telegram—if the wires are still intact—will get materials and tools there to meet you. Take your man Dwight, and I'll give you all the money you need. Agreeable?"

"Yes, padre. But — you're certain I couldn't do anything for Billy June?"

He dropped a big hand on my shoulder.

"I'm certain of that. Nothing can be done for him that my agents are not doing. As soon as he needs you, you shall go post-haste to Olivenca. Trust me."

So I went bridge-building, and was at it one week.

On the evening of the eighth day, while

I was out on the road to meet Padre Paolo and his forces, coming down more than eight thousand strong, a sniper stole across the pontoon bridge we had finished, crept to my tent, saw a figure there, and shot dead a young boy the padre had sent me as a personal servant. The next minute that sniper was a corpse, pierced by six bullets from the guns of the men near-by; I believe that was my narrowest escape from death.

At midnight, with four trusted men from the padre's staff, I started in young Dwight's machine for Olivenca to save Billy June, if I could. A message had come to Padre Paolo that evening, while he was on his way to my bridge, saying that June had been court-martialed and sentenced to be shot at sunrise. I had five hours—and most excellent promise of ending my expedition by facing the same firing squad.

Less than four miles from Olivenca, while we were making fifty miles an hour along the smooth boulevard, some man in ambuscade beside the road fired at and hit our rear tire. The big machine skidded, bounced to one side, and turned turtle, throwing me and three of the padre's men into a vegetable garden, but pinning beneath it the fourth man and plucky little Dwight. I had two broken fingers on my left hand, to add to the painful wound in my shoulder received a week before; otherwise I was sound. The padre's men were bruised and cut, but safe.

No efforts of ours were sufficient to raise the big car, so I left two of my party there, and with Capitao Mendez hurried on, afoot, into Olivenca. Not half a mile away we overtook a man who turned his face to me as I passed and stopped me dead in my tracks.

He was Miguel de Lima, the man Billy June and I had seen aboard the fruit ship coming up from Rio, who was so exactly like a twin of Senhor Costavel, secretary to Governor Valenzuela. I had no time to think of plans—I merely knew that I could use him—and I took him along, to his great surprise, but—after I had showed him a money-belt full of gold coins—without any strenuous objection on his part.

The next three hours passed like a nightmare. The nearer I got to Billy June the more clearly I realized his danger, for Olivenca was under military law, there were Brazilian and state soldiers everywhere, and in the official buildings, even at that unearthly hour, almost every office was ablaze with lights. Automobiles tore by us with their sirens screaming, military aides dashed about madly, and there were many people in the streets, all busy on mysterious errands.

The padre's Capitao Mendez knew Olivenca as he might have known his own house, and that he was a practised spy I soon realized. Otherwise we would never have gotten more than a few blocks into the city without arrest.

He led the way through alleys and buildings in a course so devious that I was almost immediately confused as to directions, and presently we found ourselves in an inner office in what seemed to be a very large building, and my escort was talking in whispers with a bearded man in uniform.

The Brazilian I had picked up on the road seated himself and waited philosophically. The officer beckoned to me in a moment and I joined the two over his table.

"Senhor June is in grave danger," he said directly without waiting for an introduction. "I have already risked my neck and the padre's interests more than once in trying to aid Senhor June. I can do nothing now except get you a pass to see him. My friend tells me that you were with June when he was arrested. You will take big chances if the police see you. What do you desire?"

"I want to see June at the first possible minute." I said promptly.

"I will arrange it. The man with you—who is he?"

"A man I wish to leave in some place, from which he will not escape," I said.

I wanted to run no risks of having this lucky accident made valueless through his sudden change of heart if he decided to abandon me.

"Leave him in my assistant's room, then."

I crossed to Miguel de Lima then.

"You can be of such service to me tonight as to earn any reward you can name," I said to him rapidly but clearly. "My friend here will let you wait for me until I return. Does that please you?"

The secretary's double looked at me keenly.

"Does that reward mean English gold?"

"It does. If you help me and I accomplish what I desire you shall have a small fortune."

"That is well," he said. "I will wait."

I left him in the care of this mysterious officer, apparently a captain, attached to the governor's staff, but obviously a faithful friend of Padre Paolo's, took my pass from him, and was guided to the state prison by Capitao Mendez.

The pass was authoritative. I was admitted at once, led down a long stone corridor, halted at a steel door. The guard unlocked the cell, switched on a light, pushed me in, closed the door and left. The prisoner rolled over on a long iron cot at one side of the dungeon, yawned, and reached for his cigaret papers and tobacco.

"Hello, Doag," drawled Billy June as casually as if we were meeting on the Avenue in Rio. "How you doing?"

I tried to be as collected as he and nonchalant as he was, but I failed miserably. For a moment I could scarcely speak. Billy grinned.

"Sit down and swallow once or twice, Ed," he said easily. "And then shoot the news."

His heroism calmed me. As briefly as I could I told him what I had done, and how I had reached the cell.

"Do you remember the fellow we saw in the steerage coming up from Rio?" I asked, then. "The one who looked like the governor's secretary?"

Billy contemplated the end of his cigaret, and for the first time I saw his hand tremble a little.

"Yep. Miguel Somebody or other."

"Miguel de Lima. I ran into him this morning on the road. He had been visiting friends and his horse ran away, so he was walking back to Olivenca. He's waiting for me now where I got this pass to see you. I thought we might be able to use him in the morning——"

I stopped abruptly and shivered. Billy June laughed.

"In the morning is when we can use him, Doag," he said cheerfully. "Let me figure on it a minute."

I sat waiting and hoping. Down the corridor I heard a guard's feet shuffle on the pavement; from somewhere in the distance came the sound of water trickling coldly into a pool. The place was full of horrors for me—and Billy June, my best friend, in a condemned cell waiting the arrival of his executioners at daybreak, sat coolly considering a plan for escape.

Probably a minute passed, then Billy grinned once more.

"We're in most unusual good luck, Doag," he said. "If that Miguel of yours will play the part there is a good chance And here's my plan."

AT A few minutes before five o'clock that gray morning, I, with Capitao Mendez and a secret-service man who proved to be Padre Paolo principal spy, was in a small anteroom adjoining the office of the governor of the state of Olivenca. The secret-service man was wholly skeptical of our success, the padre's man was little more hopeful.

Personally I could have seen nothing but failure, except for one thing, and that was my knowledge of Billy June's resourcefulness and daring. On these two qualities and on the ability of Miguel de Lima to play a small part for five minutes rested our chances. I realized that they were slight. And if they failed it was exceedingly unlikely that either Billy June or myself would ever leave the building alive.

After hearing what Billy June had proposed, the secret-service man and my captain had moved rapidly. It was the former who had brought us to the governor's antechamber, and we had been there but a few moments when there were steps outside the corridor door and a sentry whispered sharply—

"Who goes?"

I held my breath. Then I heard another answer, with a slight cough:

"Stand aside, fool. A prisoner to see Senhor the *Governador*."

"On whose word?" the sentry jerked.

The voices were all low, for it was known that the governor was trying to get a few hours' sleep.

The answer came in the voice of Miguel de Lima. It was an unnatural voice, and if the words had been outspoken they probably would have caused suspicion. But in the stage whisper used it was less easily identifiable.

"I am Senhor Alberto Costavel, the secretary, soldier," Miguel said. "Are you asleep?"

The sentry evidently gave another look, for there was a brief delay, then abruptly his feet shuffled on the marble floor, the door was opened, and in walked Billy June, with two guards, and after them Miguel, dressed in a suit of black we had procured for him earlier. Miguel was ill at ease, but he managed to close and latch the door.

From the dark corner where I stood, with my two men, it was plainly evident that the guards in charge of June were dissatisfied. One of them swung on Miguel abruptly.

"They said below that his Excellency was asleep," he growled. "Fetch us to him quickly, for the time is short."

Miguel stepped back, quite consumed with terror. His hand struck an inkwell on a desk, and it fell to the floor, shattered, with a crash. I knew that the minute had come, and in one leap I was at the side of one of the guards and had knocked him senseless with my clubbed revolver. At the same moment Billy June grappled with the second guard, a hand covering the fellow's mouth.

I sprang to help, and in another minute the man was bound hand and foot with a cord I had taken from a window hanging. I held my revolver at his head while Capitao Mendez, who had remained hidden for fear of the inopportune entrance of some outsider, came forward and stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth. Then the captain disappeared again.

Meanwhile, as I discovered later, the secret-service agent, acting on the moment's inspiration, had already passed calmly out, engaged the sentry in conversation, and walked with him the length of the corridor. Undoubtedly his forethought saved us, for we had made some slight disturbance.

That it had been sufficient to attract attention we were not long in determining. As I straightened and whipped the perspiration from my forehead, an inner door opened, and, in his pajamas, and with his eyes still heavy, there entered Senhor Alberto Costavel, the governor's secretary.

What he saw in this littered office-room, which he had probably quitted but a short time before, brought him up standing, wide awake. Billy June had taken a clumsy, old-fashioned revolver from one of the guards and this he presented at Senhor Costavel's head before the cry that he was about to give had reached his lips.

"Quiet, Senhor," Billy June jerked. "If you make a sound, down you go."

The secretary stared at him.

"Senhor June!" he cried, "what is this?"

"You may see, if you behave," Billy answered shortly. "I was lucky enough to save your life on the fruit steamer ten days ago. When I was caught here you refused to turn your hand for me. If it wasn't for the noise I'd kill you like a rat."

Senhor Costavel stepped back a little.

"I could do nothing," he said. "You were caught with papers taken from the governor's office. You were known to be friendly with Padre Paolo. And now——"

Suddenly his eye caught the face of the man in black who stood near the door. Miguel, who had played the secretary, and who had done it well, for our purposes, shifted uneasily. Billy June saw the glance.

"A friend of ours," he said in explanation. "He has been good enough to go to the warden of the prison and bring me here to see the governor. Down-stairs they think *you* brought me up. To that extent you have been of service to me."

Senhor Costavel swallowed hard.

"I would do what I could," he muttered, still staring as if fascinated at his double.

June snapped him up.

"Would you? I'll give you a chance. Go on in and summon the governor."

The secretary paused irresolutely. Billy June flourished his ancient revolver. The man started violently, looked once around him, then nodded.

"Very well," he said, and crossed the room.

"Don't be afraid," Billy June added, "I'm going with you. I wouldn't trust you beyond an open door."

What June's further play was I could not guess. But he and the secretary went out I heard a new, heavy voice speak sharply, and I heard the smooth tones of the secretary. Then a word from Billy June, undistinguishable, an exclamation, a moment's silence, and in padded the governor in his stocking feet, coatless and collarless, with Billy June and the secretary close behind him.

As he took in, with a glance, the conditions and persons in his room, the governor purpled, but Billy June curtly ordered him into a chair, and he sat down, with a grunt.

What followed seems to me now unbelievable. It was only a matter of minutes before the guard below in the prison would become uneasy, before the sentry would hear unusual sounds and enter, or before some unlooked-for arrival would precipitate ruin for us. Yet Billy June was as calm as I have ever seen him.

"Excellency," he began abruptly, "when I was arrested in this room I had on me papers I had found here, as you know well. I suppose that they have since been destroyed, but I have a good memory—I remember names and dates and amounts named in those papers that, if they were carried to Rio, would land you in prison for life. They would also put most of your family and your officials there with you. I am going to be free in another hour, and I am going back to Rio. I want to take your resignation with me."

The governor straightened and raised his fist, but Billy June caught it and bent the arm cruelly.

"Listen, you *vergonha* dog, you! I will not argue. My friends and I are in danger of being caught at any minute—life means little to us. We have everything to win and nothing to lose. If you don't write and sign as I order, you and your secretary die here like the traitors you are! Hear me?"

He gave the old man no chance to think or talk. He snatched a piece of paper from the desk, dipped a pen in an inkwell—and I saw then that it was red ink, peculiarly—and put a heavy hand on the governor's shoulder. The old man sweated profusely and his hand shook, but he took the pen and wrote. It was but a line:

"*Eu só resignó,*" (I resign) and was signed: "Francisco Valenzuela, Governor of Olivenca."

Billy June grabbed it so hurriedly that the pen made a long, scrawling mark from the end of the signature to the corner of the paper and the pen stuck into the desk blotter. In a second the paper was in Bill June's pocket and I had opened an inner door that had been pointed out to me by the padre's friends. Miguel de Lima darted through it, Billy June crossed hastily, and at that moment the corridor door opened and into the governor's room burst the warden of the prison.

He was a man of prudence, well enough. He did not hesitate, but backed out precipitately and shouted. Billy and I leaped into the rear hallway together and ran after Miguel, and when we overtook him we found the padre's agent with him, just opening a heavy door. He motioned us into that, and in we plunged.

At the same time we heard other cries above, the loud and violent ringing of a bell, and the report of revolver shots. We were now in a long, dark corridor that was damp and heavy with a smell of the underground, and that, in fact, proved to be a sloping passage ending in a short tunnel which led onto a by-way from a lower street At the end of this tunnel our guide stopped.

"There is a car outside," he snapped. "Make it on the run. *Adios!*"

We had no time for thanks, but broke through the opening and plunged into the car—Miguel first, Billy June and I after him. The driver started at once, but before he had shifted his gears there swept around a corner a hundred yards in front of us half a dozen cavalrymen.

The chauffeur grunted and kicked his throttle. There was no room and no time in which to turn about. Our one chance was to take a corner leading into a transverse alleyway. To make this we would have to cover half the distance between ourselves and the horsemen—in other words we would be turning under their horses' noses. The driver was gritty, the rest of us were desperate.

I shoved my extra revolver into the hand of Miguel and our three weapons barked at once. The driver was crouched below his wheel—how he managed to steer passes my comprehension. A perfect fusillade screamed around us, and our own revolvers were cracking steadily.

I felt the blaze of a hot iron across my cheek. Little Miguel screamed and sank to the floor of the tonneau. The machine struck a curb, swung left sharply, skidded dizzily, and straightened out.

One horseman was directly over me as I looked up from the turn and we fired together. I shall not soon forget his face as he half rose in his stirrups, squealed piteously and slid heavily from the plunging mount. The back of our car splintered under bullets—but in another moment we were out of range. I gasped for breath, wiping the blood from my cheek, and turned about.

Billy June was ripping off his coat and shirt, and red stained his hands as he worked But he grinned.

"Well, Eddie," he drawled comically, "they cut us up some—but we're on our way."

Then he fell into his seat and fainted.

AT EIGHT o'clock that morning we were safely hidden away in the home of a faithful friend of the padre's forty miles from the capital. Billy

June was badly hurt, Miguel but slightly. As for me, my slash across the face was but a surface scratch, annoying, particularly on top of the sore shoulder and my smashed knuckles, but not important.

The people in the place went at once for a doctor and a skilful old man returned with them and overhauled June thoroughly The bullet had entered his chest between the seventh and eighth ribs, on the right side, and for a while the doctor believed that it had so badly torn his lung that there would be little chance to avoid pneumonia He gave strict orders for quiet and forbade Billy talking, so that it was some days before I got his story—quite after all our adventures were over.

For the sake of clarity, however, I shall interject his recital here, briefly. He had gone with his unwilling captive from the room where he and I had ambuscaded the men sent to ambuscade us, to the governor's palace, and had walked boldly into an office that was empty. There he had waited for two hours until things were quiet, when he had taken his man with him, forcing him to point the way, to the governor's suite.

Taking long chances was Billy June's best maneuver on that eventful night—he had gotten in safely and had secured a number of papers of the utmost importance before an army man stumbled in. June had bested this first arrival, but the luck that had been with him before failed then, and two secret service men had entered.

Billy had been arrested without a struggle, because he had seen that they were too many for him and that to start shooting would have ended in his own death on the spot.

"And I was still counting on you, Eddie," he said in his characteristic drawl. "I had the goods, and I wanted to get away with 'em."

Once in prison he played for delay, and, with the aid of friends of Padre Paolo's following the latter's telegram ordering him given every possible assistance, he had gotten it.

But two things had defeated him: one the discovery by the governor that Padre Paolo was getting ready to move soon, the other the fact that a guard overheard a friend of the padre's giving Billy a secret password, for use in identifying himself in an emergency.

Billy laughed here when he told me the story.

"I had about as much use for a secret password as a man has for water in his boots," he said. "But this fellow slipped it over, and was heard. That cooked my goose with the governor. I suppose he thought I was a conspirator of the first water, and he decided to put himself out of danger as soon as he could. They court-martialed me and—well, you know the rest."

"What was the sign, Billy?" I asked.

"You heard it later, Doag," he said. "Remember when that bunch started up the rise toward the timber to get the padre?'

I remembered it well enough. It was the phrase I referred to in the beginning of this tale as having been the means of defeating an army corps.

I must get back to that, and I must again jealously guard my story against superfluous details. Concerning our enforced wait under the doctor's care I must record that I chafed for action from the first minute, that Billy June showed remarkable recuperative powers, and that Miguel was well enough to leave us that same evening. The bullet that had felled him had struck a small book of some sort he carried in a breast pocket and it had been the force of the blow, rather than a wound, that had put him out.

I gave the man what money I had with me and he accepted it modestly, promising to come to Rio for the balance. Afterward, Billy June received a letter from Miguel saying that the padre had paid him, and that he was well satisfied to have served us as he had.

At noon on the second day Billy signaled for a pencil and paper, and when he had them he wrote asking if I would attempt to reach the padre with the resignation the governor had written and signed. I was eager to go.

But first I asked Billy June a question that had puzzled me greatly.

"Why did Governor Velenzuela surrender without a fight, Billy?" I said. "It seems to me that he came through with a rather suspicious promptness."

Billy smiled cheerfully, and, quite against orders, croaked hoarsely—

"Two reasons."

I touched his lips.

"Don't talk, you fool—write! What were the two reasons?"

Billy took up his pencil in his feeble

fingers and his smile broadened into a grin as he wrote:

"Thought we wouldn't get away clear—one. Two—gun at his head!"

I laughed aloud. Billy June would joke on the edge of his own grave!

But I saw that he was right about the governor's thoughts in complying with the abrupt request Billy had shot at him. And I knew, too, that the resignation would strengthen the hands of Padre Paolo considerably. It was a master stroke on Bill June's part, for it was the "ace in the hole" that the padre needed. Without question the biggest achievement of our adventurous fortnight in the state of Olivenca was obtaining that precious bit of paper, with its significant message in that significant red ink.

MY PLANS for reaching Padre Paolo with the little document were quickly made. The people who had given us shelter furnished me with a horse, and a young boy in the family eagerly offered his services as guide. With him riding before me, scouting for military parties that were thick through that section, I started off once again to find adventure in the cause of this extraordinary priest.

We left late in the afternoon and had ridden probably twelve miles when my guide stopped me with a gesture and slid from his horse. I followed his example, we tethered the animals, and together crept forward. He had seen a camp-fire and the silhouette of a sentry ahead.

We had stopped just in time. Through the thick underbrush we could see a long line of camps before us, completely blocking our way. The boy bent close.

"Shall we go back, senhor?" he whispered.

There was nothing else to do, and I nodded. But going back was not so easy. We had been coming cautiously, and therefore slowly. But the movements of the governor had been more expeditious.

We had not retreated more than a mile when the boy halted again, and again slid from his horse. This time he came to me with blank dismay in his face.

"They come in thousands, senhor," he said fearfully. "We may not go back—I see them at our right and our left from that tree beyond. What now?"

It was a problem. We couldn't go forward, we couldn't retreat. There were moving forces on four sides. Under the circumstances there was but one thing for it—to remain where we were. And that is what we did, through having no alternative course open.

The boy knew of a small hill a few rods east of us, and toward this we crept by inches. I did not fancy being caught now and I took every precaution. In the end we reached the hill in safety, and there, among some rocks, he showed me a tiny cavern. Into this, without food, blankets or water, we crawled and there we lay together.

You may remember that I passed some strenuous days and nights since leaving Rio; you will not be surprised to learn that I fell asleep. When I was awakened it was by the sharp rattle of infantry fire and the shouted orders of excited officers.

My guide and I turned to the mouth of our tiny retreat—little more, in the growing light of day, than a crack in the rocky hill's face—and looked down to see. What we saw immediately before us was the long line of soldiers into which we had bumped the night before. The men were hastily forming into rank, and as fast as they were formed they began moving backward, toward us. At first we could see no reason, but presently, from out of some woods far beyond, we saw a roll of smoke, followed by another volley of rifle-shots.

We were looking down on the beginning of a battle and the men behind that smoke over there were the untrained, but valorous friends of Padre Paolo. The governor's forces were falling back! I could not understand.

Then the clearer light and their movement in retreat showed me something—the officers of the state troops were having difficulty with their men. It was all indefinite, but I could see the officers charging up and down the lines waving their swords and attempting to stem the retreat.

An aide, at a dead gallop, passed not far from us, going away from the scene I have just described, and in fifteen minutes we heard the roar of hoof-beats behind and eight troops of cavalry swept by toward the wavering infantry. This changed the situation and the forward line stopped.

Intermittently there would come a volley from those protecting woods to the west, then silence. Momentarily I expected a charge, but none came. For some reason the padre was not giving battle; he was waiting.

Half an hour passed, and then, up from the east, came the line we had discovered the night before cutting off our retreat. They poured by us in numbers so great as to astound me. I thought of the padre's eighteen thousand — untrained, unskilled, officered by working people, with the big priest himself as commanding officer—and I shuddered. It seemed to me only a question of an hour or two when I would see his cause fall to the ground before my eyes.

When the second line had joined the cavalry and the forward troops, there was only a brief wait. Then bugles sounded and the reinforced line, probably a mile long and a quarter of a mile deep, began moving against that timber and its occasional smoke-wreaths.

What followed was in turn magnificent, awe-inspiring, fearful. When within half a mile of the concealing woods in the distance the companies began to move at the double-quick.

All firing from the timber had ceased. The distance between the governor's forces and the woods lessened rapidly. Then the van began the charge.

I held my breath. The silence from beyond grew terrible to me. Why didn't the padre speak, if ever he was going to do so? I remembered a famous order I had read of as given by a general in the States, I believe it was: "Hold your fire until you can see the whites of their eyes!" The padre was undoubtedly planning the same tactics. But the charging lines came nearer and nearer, and there was not a sound.

With loud cries that could be heard where we crouched watching, the first of the charging line tore up and into the woods. Others followed them. Still there was silence, save for the cries of excited men. There were a few scattering shots, revolvers probably, but no general engagement.

I could reach but one conclusion—the padre had retreated, drawing the enemy into an ambuscade. But, little as I knew of military things, it seemed incredible that he could ambuscade a whole army corps.

Suddenly the scene changed. There was a tense silence, then a roar of cheers that seemed to sweep for miles along those woods. Out from them there came leaping two or three men, then half a dozen, then a score—and soon there were a hundred, I judge, madly dashing out toward the second and third lines of the attackers. Into the ranks of these they ran, and behind them still only occasional shots, but always and continuously that maniac cheering And as those fleeing men broke into the secondary lines these stopped, wavered, were shattered, spilled backward a few men and left the others cheering and advancing toward the sheltering woods.

I could stand it no longer. Whatever was happening, the padre's men were not being shot down in the shadow of that timber.

I leaped to my feet and ran straight down our little hill, avoided the troops by dodging into a coulée, and came to a point half a mile nearer the mysterious and mystifying woods. Then I saw running toward me, as I had seen them from the hill cave, probably a hundred men, scattered, breathless panic-stricken, without hats, swords, guns —some even throwing off their coats. They were officers—the officers of the crack state troops, officers of the state police—all officers. And kicking up the dust about their heels were bullets, the scattering fire I had heard from my hiding-place. The officers were in full and terrorized retreat. Where was the army?

Suddenly the cheering that I had heard resolved itself for me into intelligible parts—I found that it was a phrase in Portuguese. It comes to me clearly now, and in another instant I sat down weakly and began to laugh until the tears streamed down my face and I was compelled to roll over on the ground, with sides bursting. The governor's attack had been broken and his officers sent flying! I had wondered where the padre's trained army was in this revolution. Now I knew.

For the cry that had changed the padre's defeat into victory was this:

"*Quen nao honore Padre Paolo?*—Who would dishonor Padre Paolo?"

He had laughed when I had asked about his army. No wonder. The whole army was his—the army without its officers! And these latter were now flying from their own men, in complete rout, for the army had gone over to the padre and were chanting with his ragged and untrained volunteers—

"Who would dishonor Padre Paolo?"

Thus ended the battle. I made my way unafraid into his lines, found myself at last at his side, threw myself through the group that surrounded him, still cheering, singing, and acclaiming him, and seized his hand.

"Who would dishonor Padre Paolo?" I

shouted. "Not I, padre, and not Billy June!" And I gave him the governor's resignation.

He looked at me whimsically, holding the bit of paper in his hand without examining it.

"Welcome, my son," he said in his big, smooth voice. "And your friend Billy June —is he safe?"

"Safe now, and recovering from a nasty wound. But see for what he paid the price of a wound, padre!"

Not until then did he glance at the paper. For a moment he could not believe what he saw, I think. Then he turned to his leaders, who stood waiting.

"Senhors," he said with a husky note in his voice, "God and good friends are with us. We had thought that this was but our first battle to win. This brave lad from the States and his daring friend, Senhor June, have won a great battle—have overturned the enemy!"

And when he had read those red-inked lines and the signature, such a cheer arose as deafened and weakened me, and made all that had gone before seem like children's shouts.

Padre Paolo rested a hand on my shoulder.

"I can not leave now. This paper makes it more than ever important that I press on to Olivenca. But you must go for me with an automobile and carry your friend Billy June to the capital as soon as he can be safely moved. Will you undertake that one last mission in my behalf?"

I did not need to consent, he knew that I would go. In half an hour I had picked up my boy-guide and was rolling smoothly toward the little ranch-house at Vina, proud to be the ambassador sent to bring Billy June to his first meeting with Padre Paolo.

* * *

AND now there is but little more to tell. With the resignation of Governor Valenzuela in his possession, Padre Paolo had the entire situation in hand. He despatched messengers to Olivenca with instructions to his agents there to prevent the escape of as many officials as possible, and the drag-net brought in eighteen men.

The governor, his secretary, and most of his immediate family made their way northward by fruit boats, and some of them were never heard of again. On the second day after the mock battle Padre Paolo and his people, army and civilians, marched into Olivenca, and once again this old, old town was thronged to capacity with a happy citizenry.

An election was hastily called, and the padre's candidate, a clean young banker of Olivenca, was unanimously chosen by the people. The army officers were scattered over the face of the state, but they were assured that nothing was held against them and most of them regained their original places.

Investigation showed that Governor Valenzuela had gotten away with a very large sum of money, and some day I may be able to tell you of his pursuit by Billy June. For I know that is coming. Padre Paolo is implacably just, and he has said that Valenzuela shall be punished in this life as well —so he puts it—as in the life that is to come. Of course it will be June who will take the trail. For the present, however, I am glad to be peacefully looking back over my strenuous three weeks in Olivenca, and Billy June seems to be quite as peacefully recuperating from his serious injuries.

As I write this Billy June is at my elbow, poring over the pages I wrote this morning.

He throws away a cigaret, with a flip of his finger, and frowns.

"Look here, Eddie," he drawls, "you say here that I went with you in a car for my first meeting with Padre Paolo. Now where do you get that idea—out of your fertile little brain?"

"What's wrong with that, Billy?" I ask with the injured air of the artist whose handiwork is called into question. "Didn't I go from that mock battlefield to the hut at Vina to get you?"

Billy grunts.

"Oh, that part of it is all right," he says slowly. "That part is fine."

"Well?" I demand.

"Now don't hustle me along too fast, Doag," Billy remonstrates irritatingly. "Don't crowd me overboard in your excited haste. Give me a word or two in edgewise, as the fellow says, won't you? All right, then! The thing I'm crabbing about is that you say that was my first meeting with the padre."

"It wasn't?" I ask in amazement.

"Well, not exactly," Billy answers languidly. "Not exactly. I've known the padre ever since I've been in Brazil. He's the man who sent for me to go up to Oilvenca."

The Camp-Fire

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

I HONOR the men who give their services to the country by joining the militia. The men themselves are all right, but the system is rotten with politics and inefficiency. It is not the men's fault, but it is they who have to pay the costs when the test comes. The blame centers at Washington and upon some of the militia officers, particularly upon some of the higher officers, who have more regard for personal "glory" and advancement than for efficiency and patriotism.

THE whole country should blush with shame over the showing up of our National Guard system by the Mexican crisis. Brave, willing and eager, such of them as could be made ready for service at all were sent to the Border with the kind of equipment and supplies that belong in comic opera. They were handled in many cases with less care and with far less intelligence than goes to the handling of a cattle-train. Thanks to the militia system, a large proportion of them were entirely raw recruits—not militia at all, but ordinary green volunteers.

And even the old men had so little of the training it takes to make a real soldier that if they had asked to serve under the flag of one of the warring European nations they would not have been allowed to get anywhere near the firing-line but would have been kept at home in training-camp for at least six months—more probably a year—of hard, constant, daily training and hardening.

FOR one of the most hopeless things about our militia system is that a good man can join it, fulfil its utmost obligation, seize every opportunity it offers and yet get only a smattering of what it takes to make a real soldier. Has it ever occurred to you that a man gets more actual training in the four weeks of a Plattsburg camp than he gets from a whole year in the militia? Count up the hours and see for yourself. And the Plattsburg training is better besides.

We call them "tin soldiers" and they *are* tin soldiers. But it's not the men's fault. Indeed, we should only honor them the more because, in spite of the lacks and disadvantages of militia service, they have given themselves to it because it was at least the best means they could find of serving their country. But the system? Down with it!

HERE is a little incident of the Spanish-American war, one of ten thousand that proves you can't make a citizen into a soldier "between sunrise and sunset" even when the citizen has passed the kindergarten grades by taking militia or hurried volunteer "training." And note that it is the men themselves that pay the costs. It's never the people responsible who have to pay. It's never the pacifists and politicians who have to bear the suffering and death that could have been prevented. Who sent men unprepared to such a test? Who made them suffer? Who killed them?

It is Wolcott LeClear Beard who gives us the incident and, as he has served as commissioned officer in more than one army, he knows what a real soldier is, what casualties are necessary and what could have been prevented by horse-sense preparation in advance.

> There was a case in point which, probably because it was the first real instance of the consequences of unpreparedness that I had seen, impressed me most vividly.
>
> It was in Puerto Rico, in 1898. I was riding toward Ponce on the military road when I overtook a certain volunteer regiment—or rather, what had been a regiment. Now it was about 300 strong—if one could properly use that word in this connection.

Never had I seen such men on their feet. Emaciated, fever-racked and pitiably feeble, many could hardly stagger under the weight of their rifles and packs. The burdens of some were distributed among comrades only a little less feeble than they. More were carried by friendly natives, who walked alongside the column. Deeply shocked, I pushed forward, and, as I passed the commanding officer, saluted and remarked—

"A long sick report you have, colonel."

"Sick report!" he repeated, disgustedly. "Those? ——! Why, they're my duty men!"

I WENT through the camp of a portion of this same regiment. I could smell it before I could see it. It swarmed with flies. Filth lay everywhere. Apparently it had not been policed since the first tent-peg was driven.

Moreover, in the fearful camp of that regiment was an actual shortage of suitable food, though the commissary stores were fairly bursting with wholesome supplies of all sorts. These men were still feeding on travel rations. Rations, that is, though excellent for the use for which they were designed, are not supposed to be given those who have a semi-permanent habitation, and not given to any one for longer than the limits of a journey, where other food cannot be prepared, require. The trouble was simply that their officers could not make out the necessary requisitions—could not fill out the blanks that had been given them—in a manner that the Subsistence Department could recognize. That, of course, was only an incident, and though an important incident, still one that could readily be brought to a conclusion. The trouble was that this incident was simply a type of so many others.

SHORTLY afterward, by way of pointing the contrast, I arrived at my destination, a one-company post. The street of that company, and also the stretches behind the tents, were graveled; and each individual pebble looked as though it had been scrubbed. The kitchens were immaculate. There was a spring of pure water, with a pump filter and a sentry standing over it to see that it was kept pure. Some of the men were amusing themselves by performing athletic stunts in the company street, and some were singing.

In one case the officers had been elected by their men; in the other they had been taught their business and were on the job.

ONE of the stories in this issue is by Wallace Davis, but Wallace Davis can no longer stand up among men and talk to them. Some months after we bought the story there came to me a letter from his father, saying that the son, after a brave fight, had succumbed to the ravages of tuberculosis. But he had written a letter for you of the Camp-Fire and I give it here because, though it has the sadness of a voice from the dead, a man who lives bravely and dies bravely has our respect. He did both and we can make this the occasion for taking our hats off to him.

His letters to me showed a rare promise and were color-touched with a splendid imagination and an irrepressible gaiety that gave no hint of the grimness of his fight. And only a year ago he wrote:

> Well, I'm only twenty-three and I may do something yet, for I'm just about hitting my stride again.

Of his story, "Oil," he said:

> Neither the characters nor the incidents are drawn from any particular place. The story is placed in Colfax, Calif., because it was a likely place. The idea is an old one: a little oil quiets an unbelievable amount of water; a little love cures mountains of trouble.

Here is what he wrote for you:

My good friends, " 'cross my heart," I'm just an ordinary young chap. I've never killed a man, not even in self-defense. I have never even shot at a man through fun or feud. I have never rescued a girl from anything more alarming than a flooded gutter and a spider. I've just been living along out here in California—and just as quietly slipped into *Adventure*.

At different times in California I have worked in newspaper offices, mostly in the circulation end. I have guided and guarded a young four-page educational monthly into steadier channels. I have sold trade journals advertising ideas and articles. I have "carded" street-cars with advertising, a night barn job. I have drawn a magazine insert, posters, unique window cards and so forth. All very ordinary occupations, but interesting sometimes.

TO SHOW you how thrilling my life has been I will ask you to consider the time, April 18, 1906, when the Coast earthquake arrived. I was living in Oakland at the time, just across the Bay. Every one was pouring in from San Francisco with the dear old company's books, or a nice yellow canary, or the family plate, or a surprised-looter's-bullet-just-missed-me story. I saw chimneys patter to earth and cornices swing in the breeze. But there was not a thing around town that a young man could do; a policeman told me so; and I went home.

That evening I sat on a three-rail fence (the whole neighborhood was likewise perched on this fence which was on a noble hill) and read the *Call-Chronicle-Examiner* by the light of the San Francisco blaze which was some twelve miles distant. Some newspaper men may smile at a community issue of the old *San Francisco Call*, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner*. I still have, I think, the first two pages of that issue. It is getting to be quite a curiosity.

ANOTHER thrilling episode in my life occurred in the "Seville" of my story. For a time I lived in a cabin where my bed was protected by the following besides the roof: one umbrella suspended from the ceiling; the oilcloth table-cloth lay just beneath the umbrella across my bed, this keeping off the droppings from the rib-ends; also ten suspended lard-pails. This was on the sleeping-porch; the main room wasn't so bad but the kitchen had to be bailed out every rainy morning.

THE lineoleum in the main room, however, often gave me what are sometimes called the "willies." This cabin was out on the knoll of a hill where the wind pretty nearly teased it to pieces. The floor had evidently been laid to a very economical rule; it gaped and yawned. And the linoleum wasn't tacked—it was new and in one piece and had to be walked on a while before tacking. Well, the wind would sweep across through the railroad cut, slip under the cabin and puff that linoleum up a foot or eighteen inches like a great blister. When I walked across it I would drag my feet though I raised them almost to my knees at each step. It was like wading in an enormous pneumatic mattress. A drinking man would never have lived to tell the tale.

Now that I have so gallantly dragged you through fire and water, you will probably appreciate peace and some soothing smoke. Cigar, pipe, or cigaret?

WHICH WERE THE BEST ADVENTURE STORIES DURING 1916?

AS ANNOUNCED at our September Camp-Fire our readers are to be the judges in picking out the ten best stories published in *Adventure* during 1916. This voting contest will not only be interesting to readers, authors and editors but will be of great help to us in getting for you in future the kinds of story the majority of you like best. Probably we'll make it a yearly custom and it should do a good deal toward making the stories in *Adventure* please you more and more as the years go on.

Perhaps the ten stories of 1916 receiving the largest vote may be issued later in book form, but we can't be sure of that yet.

THE voting will be very easy and simple. Just take a sheet of paper, write your list of ten stories, in order of preference, state about how many 1916 issues you have read, add your name and address and mail it to us. That's all.

Note carefully the few rules. *Any one* may vote *provided* he has read at least five of the 1916 issues of *Adventure*. (By 1916 we mean the twelve issues with that date printed on them—that is, January, 1916, to December, 1916, inclusive.)

It doesn't matter whether a story is long or short; serials, novels, novelettes, short stories and articles, all these may be voted for. A serial or series only part of which was published in 1916 may also be counted in. But "Camp-Fire," poems and the little articles I myself have written on Defense are barred out.

The same author may appear as many times in the list as you please.

No votes reaching us later than December 31, 1916, will be counted. (Some allowance will be made for those who are weeks distant by mail.) A list of the winners will be published in the earliest subsequent issue possible.

AND here's a thing to *note particularly*. Stories in the more recent issues of 1916 will naturally be more vivid in your mind than stories printed back in the early part of the year. Unless you allow carefully for this it will not be fair to the authors of the earlier stories. We'll reject any ballot that covers only the last two or three issues of the magazine.

Mr. Wade and I will vote too, if you don't mind, for after all we're readers just as you are and have our preferences just as all the rest of you do.

Here is what goes on each ballot:

(1) List of the ten stories, *given in order of preference*, that you consider the ten best stories published in *Adventure* during 1916 (January to December issues inclusive). Giving name of author also in each case will make things surer.

(2) About how many of the twelve 1916 issues of *Adventure* have you read? (If not 5 or more, do not vote.)

(3) Name and address.

AND if, in addition to the ten, you wish to add a few others you liked almost as well, give them too in order of preference. We'll call it "honorable mention" and it may serve to break a possible tie among the first ten.

And will you please send in your vote as soon as possible? Why not do it right now?

I'VE talked a good deal in favor of organizing such reserve volunteer regiments as the Red-Heads, Gray-Heads, Tropical Tramps, and so on. I knew that, except in two or three cases, there was practically no chance of seeing these regiments actually accomplished. Our Government not only fails to create an adequate regular army and reserves but is slothful in any encouragement of efforts by the citizens themselves to step in and fill the gap. We all know that and I shall not enlarge upon it.

BUT back of all these suggested regiments is the valuable practical idea of organizing and naming military units in the United States according to common physical characteristics, birthplace, profession and so on of the men forming them. It means added *esprit de corps*, and that means added practical effectiveness. Other nations have taken advantage of this inexpensive method of increasing efficiency. Any trained soldier will be quick to testify to its practical value. Why should we not adopt this method instead of giving regiments dry numbers instead of names, or give them names in addition to numbers?

Sow the seed and some day the plant will grow.

BUT there is more than this behind these suggested regiments. If war with Japan or a big European war comes upon us, we shall not only need all our boasted resources but we shall find that, because of not sufficiently preparing and organizing it in advance, we are unable to bring them to bear when we need them. Therefore every step that *is* taken in advance is going to be of vital value when the emergency brings its inevitable confusion, lack of time, and national blundering and helplessness.

In the mad scramble that will arise the most urgent of our many huge tasks will be to provide and train men for the firing-line. But of almost equal importance will be the task of providing the second army that will be needed for hospital work, transportation, ammunition, supplies, communication, and so on. Where is that second army now? Our American Legion, the Red Cross, and a few other organizations are doing a little, but their work, however good, can be only a drop in the bucket. Surely our Spanish war and the Mexican fiasco have proved our disgraceful and criminal unpreparedness for even a tiny war.

ANOTHER thing. Europe has shown us that a real war means the use not only of fit men but of half-fit men, quarter-fit men, old men, boys, women. What has our country done to organize or prepare these others to serve her when the tragic moment comes to us?

Are you just going to go on growling, complaining and cussing about it? Are you just going to go on blaming our legislators for doing nothing? Or are *you* going to *do* something about it yourself? It's *your* country too, isn't it?

WELL, here is something to do. There is much talk about Defense but, when you look things over, you find that very little is really being *done* toward it. Nearly all the work that *is* being done is devoted to the army that goes to the firing-line. What little is being done for the second army upon which the first army is entirely dependent is devoted to the human units who are what we call "fit." But how about the old men, the women, men under military height, men who wear glasses, men who for numerous other reasons will not be considered "available" when war first breaks out but who will surely be badly needed as the pressure grows? Indeed, they will be sorely needed as soon as war is declared but our unprepared country will be too busy struggling to get practical use out of its "available" but unprepared citizens to take time for these others.

SUPPOSE that, in this emergency, you could step forward and announce that you could give the country thousands of men or women who *were* prepared and ready? Would the Government reject some regiments of volunteers just because they happened to be a few inches under military height? Or ten thousand deaf men ready to work in munition factories? Or twenty thousand men who wore glasses but were entirely competent for a hundred kinds of needed work? Or thousands of men too old for active service yet trained soldiers who would make excellent drill-masters or do yeoman service in coast defense?

I REST my case there. The work needs to be done. Will you take hold? I can not. What time my regular work leaves me is already given to work for Defense and has been for nearly two years. I can not even find time to work out the detailed plans nor should I be able to produce plans as good as can those of you who yourselves belong to these classes and therefore best know their abilities. But I'll do what I can to help, and so will this magazine. Certain committees of the Naval Consulting Board might cooperate. The application blank of the American Legion will suggest methods. Army and Navy officers and men are nearly always glad to help any work for Defense. Even some of the Government departments sometimes help a little. Various Defense organizations will do what they can. Always there are individual patriots who will give of themselves and of their resources.

I know from experience that work for Defense is hard and full of discouragements. Is that any reason for turning your back on it?

AT THE October Camp-Fire you heard I. M. Robinson of Sioux Falls, S. D., make his plea that the twenty thousand able-bodied deaf men in the United States should be given a chance to serve their country. There follows a letter from a man with defective vision. And one from a man advocating a regiment of "Bantams."

What is needed in each case is a man, or men, who will take hold and *do*. Are you that man?

A few months ago the late Lord Kitchener was in Chester, England, and there he saw a number of small men who were below the standard of military height. To the Mayor of Chester, who was with him at the time, he said,

"Why not enroll them in a separate unit of their own?"

"I can get you 3,000 of them, sir, and they are very keen to go," returned the mayor.

Before long there were 12,000 of them recruited from five different counties in England. And now a whole division of them are in the fighting-line and doing jolly well.

NOW I could go on and tell you a whole lot about these "wee chaps"—the Bantams, as they are called. Can give names of some "mentioned in despatches." Could tell you of their fight at No Man's Land and how they "partly dragged and partly carried" a Maxim gun across 250 yards of ground swept with shrapnel and machine-gun fire. Did you ever try to "heft" a Maxim gun? If you did, you know the weight of one. Maybe you wonder where I get my information. Well, I get it from the "other side."

NOW for the main object. We, on this side, have for a starter the American Legion, the Red-Heads, the Gray-Heads, and the Smoke-Eaters, so why not the Bantams? Those "wee chaps." You know, all good things are not large packets. Napoleon was not very big in his looks and the late Lord Roberts was a bantam. Also, from what I can find out about U. S. Grant, he was not a very large man. There is at least one advantage these "wee chaps" have over their bigger brothers and that is there is not so much of them to hit. Perhaps this may do some good and give the "little 'uns" a chance to stand in a class by themselves like us "Red-Heads."—Albert H. Offord, Santa Monica, Calif.

P. S. I am *not* a bantam. My height is 5 ft. 8 in. The Bantams are all under 5 ft. 1 in.

That "Red-Head" regiment idea is fine, also Gray-Heads and six-footers, although you couldn't keep the red-heads out of a scrap if you wanted to.

Why doesn't some one do something for the "Four-Eyes"?

Stop to consider how many otherwise able-bodied men there are in this country who are obliged to wear glasses and are thereby barred from the service. There must be plenty of work connected with the service that could be done by the "Four-Eyes" and thereby release a large number of men for other purposes.

If you can set aside certain jobs for "Four-Eyes" and explain the requirements I, for one, would be very glad to enroll and start right now preparing myself for the work.—Henry Richards, Hotel Olive, Miles City, Mont.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Clarence Phillips, with his first *Adventure* story in this issue, stands up and introduces himself:

If any one will stop to flip over the back pages of life there will be revealed an interesting assortment of adventures. We have all had them in abundance. Their prominence in memory is in accord with the thrills we felt, the laughs we enjoyed, or the harrowing experiences we went through. My adventures have been varied because of rather dabbling tendencies in my earlier days. At the age of nine, twenty-two years ago, newspapers announced that I had started off on an expedition to fight the Indians. What a whopper! I do admit, though, that I ran away from home with a brother, four years younger, to conquer the wilderness of southern Illinois with a slingshot and a shotgun shell into which I had drilled a hole for a fuse.

THIS was my first real adventure. Since then the going has been rather fast, the road over which I traveled taking me to the ranch as a cow-puncher; to the river, steamboat and the levee camp; to the countless way stations in the career of a newspaper reporter, and where not. I saw a man stabbed; I once explored the cave of a six-shooter; I have been on raids with detectives; I have worked up evidence in murder mysteries. Hunting, fishing, baseball, football and track athletics, all have come my way—and my one big wish is that they will keep on coming.

I WAS a sort of general utility man for a levee board which was making a hard fight to hold weakened embankments on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi River a little north of Memphis. That was about thirteen years ago. Our gangs of laborers had "bagged" the threatened strip heavily for more than a mile, water trickled through and sandboils had developed with ruinous prospects.

On one side of us was the swollen river; on the other, its waste water standing belt-deep in places. Consequently we were forced to pitch our tents on the levee's very ridge. We fought the flood in three eight-hour shifts but about 9 o'clock one night found it unsafe for the men to venture far from the tents. Until the foremen gave orders to call them in they were held at their toil only by the persuasion of shotguns and revolvers.

AT 10 o'clock there was a roar and fearful splashing above us, coming almost simultaneously with six pistol-shots fired by a guard. More than two hundred workmen and refugees fled, terrified, in the other direction. Eight of us, with two negroes, remained. We threw a bateau into the backwater, which was rising rapidly—and waited.

I remember well the suspense of that night, the incessant booming and splashing of the crevasse to the north—the solemn resignation of the men. I remember speculating how long it would take that gashing current to whittle out the levee to where we were, picturing our helpless party leaping into the bateau and being whirled off into darkness—into the trees.

AND then the morning came, with a glimpse of a great gap in the levee—torn for half a mile—a raging, swirling torrent, bearing back into a spreading inland sea trees, wreckage, wreckage, wreckage. There were even houses, outbuildings and fences in the river's toll.

The lower end of the crevasse was about three hundred yards from our tents. The damage had been done by an eddy which tore out the embankment with an up-stream sweep. Had it not been for this strange providence I possibly would not be here to tell the story.

To be on the safe side of things we moved a mile south and for a week I slept on a bed suspended by ropes from the rafters of a barn. Eighteen inches under our mattress was water, ten feet deep. On two of those nights five of us bunked together in this fashion, reaching the barn in a skiff in which we deposited our clothes before turning in.

G. P. MOBLEY, out in Sulu, the Philippines, makes an interesting and odd suggestion. He made it a year ago, in fact, but it has been among the items I've been holding till space permitted their use:

I have lately wondered, when reading letters from foreign readers, if the Esperanto language might not serve as an effective medium for getting in closer touch with non-English-speaking adventurers through the columns of the "Camp-Fire." Before the war started I was corresponding with some forty Esperantists throughout Europe, Asia and Africa.

I enclose herewith a brief notice in Esperanto for the "Camp-Fire"—not so much in the hope that foreign Esperantists will first see it, as that the host of Canadian and English contingents will pass it on—(and, mayhap, across to their own enemy by capture or exchange).

Esperanto is infinitely more popular among the masses in Europe than in America, and I am confident of getting in touch with many of them by this medium. What do you think of it?

AL LA BATALANTA ESPERANTISTOJ EN EUROPA.

Salutoj! Tiel Amerikano, mi estus tre placata korespondi kun Vi. Leteroj diskoniganta grava milita sciigajo neestas deziranta, sed simple Via ciutage vivado en la tranceoj, ke estus interesanta al Amerikanon. Kiu scias, sed kio Via malamiko en la tranceo antau el Vi neestas ankau leganta tiu ci leteron nun! Estas vera ke la milito neestas batalanta por la intenco de estanta amikeme kun Via malamiko, sed Amerikanoj estas neutraluloj, kaj—bone, Via malamiko estas guste tiel huma kiel Vi estas, kaj en Ameriko Viaj leteroj estos legata kun intereso.

Se la jenaj Esperantistoj vidos tiu ci anoncon, placu skribi al min:

Lieut. Alois Havorka, K. U. K. Fähnrich, Traindivision 10, Przemysal, Galizia, Aust.; Paul Martin, 69" Caserne Chiry, Nancy, France (Meurthe-et-Moselle).

Translation: Greetings! As an American, I should be very pleased to correspond with you. Letters divulging grave military information are not desired, but simply your daily life in the trenches, that would be interesting to an American. Who knows but what your enemy in the trench in front of you is not reading this notice now! It is true that the war is not being fought for the purpose of being friendly with your enemy, but Americans are neutrals, and—well, your enemy is just as human as you are, and in America your letters will be read with interest.

If the following Esperantists should see this notice please write to me.

ENOUGH material comes in to fill the "Camp-Fire" several times over each month and from so many interesting items it's not easy to choose. As a result some of them stay in my desk a year or more, some are used at once, and some are finally filed away because—well, because some of them *have* to be filed away.

I've just been through the collection and consequently you'll find a mixture of new and old in this issue. To begin with, here's a letter from a doctor who has written us before concerning his exciting and amusing adventures in Mexico. It was dated in the latter part of 1915 and I have had no word from him since. Who knows what may have happened in the meantime?

The thought concerning Villa we now know to have been a bit premature.

I have your favor under date of July 14. It was received yesterday!

Much water has gone under the bridge since your letter was written; Villa, that picturesque bandit, has gone the way of his kind and—with Lee Christmas and Genghis Kahn.

MY LAST place got too exciting so I left it and came to town. The continual round of tea-fights and dining on tortillas and beans (in a dress suit) got to be too much for me, so I hunted up my Mexican friend D—— G—— (he was a general then) and we proceeded to get very nicely lit up. During the party D—— took me down to his car (looted from the Pullman Company) in his automobile (looted) and showed me his women. There were four of them (also looted) and D—— seemed to be aping prosperity at any rate. We threw in with the starving millions of Mexico and ate eggs and chickens until there are neither eggs or chickens on the bill of fare at the casa Ingles any more.

Then came the order for the consuls to beat it—with their subjects. The acting consular agent here promptly fled and made the other half of the family, one Z——, the acting consular agent. Z—— called me to his side and informed me that I was his confidential secretary and, moreover, if there was any consulling done it would be the sec. that would hit the ball, as he was very busy attending to his own business, which seemed to be the careful and indiscriminate sampling of everything alcoholic in the American Club. I took my honors lightly, however.

I FOUND a house to live in and bravely stuck out my shingle. The first night I moved in the *gente militar* broke into the office and robbed me of my typewriter and about $300 in U. S. money. I howled to the *Jefe Politico* and he was very diplomatic. I remarked that I wanted my stuff, not soft words and evasive promises. He informed me that he was only an understudy when it came to jefe politicoing the town and if I wanted any real satisfaction to go to the military. "How easy!" I remarked and hunted D—— up and told him my troubles. "How easy!" he remarked. "We will go to the paymaster's office, which is next to yours, and there make inquiries."

We did this—and the first thing I saw was my typewriter—on a table behind the chicken-wire screen.

D—— explained the case and wanted to know what they were going to do about it, and the paymaster said something like this:

"We are desolated to hear of the doctor's misfortune. We keep guards here all night and none of them heard a thing in the night. It is, indeed, a most mysterious affair."

"But," I stammered, "there is my typewriter on your table."

"The machine-of-to-write was bought this morning in the market," he informed me. "If it was yours you have recourse to the man that sold it to us." And he bowed me out of the office.

D—— remarked that he entertained a grave suspicion that they also had my money, but that he was only a brigadier-general while the paymaster was a major-general and for this D——'s authority over him was as a small pinch of the winds. I didn't get a mill.

THEN the Villa army evacuated one day and the next morning the city was gay with flags—Mexican, German and Turkish flags. I ran on to the German consul—a young man who takes life very seriously—and asked him about the celebration.

"Py dam," he informed me, "it's a damped outrage, dat's wod id iss. Look at dem dirty Turks. Every one of dem iss god de Choiman flack with der —— dirty rag and we've god to stand for id pecause we pe der allies!" And he went on down the street.

I WANDERED over town, looking at the display, and saw an American flag hung outside of a cantina. Now there were just four Americans in town and I knew that none of them owned the saloon, so I went in and asked for the boss. He came to me, rubbing his hands. He was a pure-bred Arab.

"Yusuff, thou son of a pig," I remarked diplomatically (I speak a little Arabic, you know), "What doest thou with the Stars and Stripes above thy dirty door, to enter which is desecration?" and I spat on the floor.

"I am Mohamet Hassan ben Hassan," he replied in English, "and am an American subject, and therefore have a right to the flag."

I thought this statement over. Then I took a shot at it.

"Son of a dog," I piped in my best Arabic, "thou liest. I am the representative of the American Government and thy miserable name is not written in the consulate. Nor speak me with English, thou unworthy hound, for thou defilest the language with those lies of thine."

He came through, but told me he had lived in the States and thought he was entitled to the use of the flag as a measure of protection for his place.

"Go thou to thine allies, the Germans, and get their protection and flags. We have none to give thee, thou Turk." He being an Arab, this was some insult, so I went away. We didn't want an American flag to show because the flags were out on account of the report that the Carranza army was coming to town and would loot it. The Turks and Arabs were most active in protecting themselves and I knew news had gotten to the Carranza lines of this condition.

WELL, the Carranza forces didn't come in that day and that night I made some thief beat the echo of my .44 out of range when he tried to crawl over my patio wall.

The next day the Carranza army came to town and order was the thing from the minute they got there. They came in about noon, hunted up their barracks, cooked dinner, and by two o'clock the town was being patrolled and policed by the soldiers. That night children played on the street until nine o'clock—an unheard-of thing for a year.

THE next morning a colonel came over to my office and deplored the absence of American flags. I explained to him the reason—and he smiled. The First Chief, Señor Citizen Carranza, was coming to town and he wanted the city to be very gay in his honor.

Bueno, I would see that there were some Gringo flags stuck around. So I had Bill T——, the money-changer, put up some red, white and blue bunting with stars on it, above his office door and the colonel kicked again. I informed him that the consulate was closed, that the American Government had ordered all its representatives out and it would thus be impossible to put a flag over the consulate; however, if he would loot me the Arab's flag from the cantina, I would do myself the honor to place it above the American Club, as we feared the promiscuous shooting up of a large one. This went and everybody has been happy ever since.

HERE is another one that came about a year ago, having been over a month in passage from Taihape, New Zealand, and it gives a look-in on that interesting people the Maoris:

> It may interest you to know what this small township is. Situated on the main trunk line connecting Auckland in the north with Wellington in the south of the North Island of New Zealand, it is the center of what is known as the "King Country"—a large reserve set aside for the aboriginal natives of N. Z., the Maoris. The work done in the legal offices here is chiefly Native Lands Work and at times affords much amusement. An old Maori *wahine* (woman) enters the office, inquires for the boss and, finding him engaged, wraps her many colored and striped shawl more closely around her and squats cross-legged in a corner of the main corridor. In that position she will remain for hours—if need be, all day—without moving. Most of the Maoris are wealthy, being holders of large tracts of land which they let to farmers at a very moderate rental. This rent is invariably collected through a solicitor and on the half-yearly rent days the office is crowded with Maoris waiting for their money.
>
> A MORE improvident race is hard to imagine. Although within certain areas liquor is forbidden the natives, yet here they can be served with intoxicants, and within half an hour after payment of their rent they will be intoxicated. They will alternately drink and sleep until all their ready cash is gone. Then they come to the office and want to borrow on the security of their next rent. It is very fortunate for the Maoris that the laws regarding sales of land by natives are very stringent. All native transactions have to be confirmed by a Native Land Board which, before sanctioning the transaction, goes thoroughly into all matters in connection with it, even to asking the native what he intends to do with the money and ofttimes taking charge of it for him. As regards religion most of the Maoris are now Mormons, simply because they have a *pake ha's* (white man's) excuse for polygamy. The usual number of wives is seven, of children seventy times seven.—B. N. Missen.

IT IS not often that, following Camp-Fire custom when a writer has his first story in *Adventure*, it is a woman who stands up to introduce herself to us, so Mrs. Mellett's appearance among us is something of a special occasion:

> Though born in the Middle West I went to the Pacific Northwest, the then territory of Washington, when the country was still so wild that I remember the Chinook jargon used almost as commonly as English. We were in Tacoma, Washington, when the gold spike was driven in the last tie of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the Northwest became directly connected with the East—and home—for at that time the East was still home to everybody but the real pioneers.
>
> I WAS in Nome, Alaska, during the big days of that camp, and since that time have pretty thoroughly seen America, having made my home inclusively and between and sideways from Sonora, California, to Washington, D. C. Have voted a lot of times in Tacoma and Seattle, Wash., at municipal and state elections, and once at a presidential election.
>
> Mr. Mellett is the manager of the Washington bureau of the United Press.
>
> Oh, yes! I was a newspaper woman—a feature writer on the regular staff of three papers before I took to writing fiction two years ago. Have written mostly Alaskan and Western things but think I will soon be familiar enough with politics to make an attempt at stories of intrigue, diplomacy and the like at the National Capital.

SOME months ago I announced that one of our number, Paul H. Bean, had kindly offered to coat our identification-cards with celluloid at the bare cost of manufacture. We sent to his factory the 5,000 new cards we had just had printed but work on them was held up because of inability to secure raw material. After three or four months of delayed hopes and a return shipment of some of the cards I've finally had to ask them to send back all the cards without their coating so that there may be no more delays in supplying applicants. The next time I make a try I'll keep my mouth closed about the coating until I have the coated cards in hand.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

ANYONE who knows anything about the Boer War knows who General Viljoen is, but most of us haven't had a chance to talk with him before, and we welcome him as he follows our Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself:

Sierra Madre, Calif.

It will be impossible to write anything much of my own biography; I can tell a story in a way, or write of another, but telling about myself seems to "get my goat," in other words, it's embarrassing.

During our quarrel with the English in South Africa they had my obituary in print three different times and each successive time the biographer had me killed in battle, first Elandslaagte, then at Telana, and latterly I was captured masquerading under the Red Cross and executed at De Aar, in the Cape Province (where I never had ventured). Of course I repudiate the allegations, but reading one's own obituary, especially when delight is expressed at your demise, makes you feel kittenish and backward.

However, here goes! Briefly and simply, as the Swede said, I use to be born in South Africa, during the troublous days of Kaffir wars, when Segihle, the Tembus, and Mampondos, and especially the Ampondomses were raising Cain in the regions they infest. My father was one of those chronic pioneers who kept moving farther into the wilds, with some others who loved adventure as he did.

So persistent a mover, or trekker, was dad that my arrival, according to my truthful dear mother, happened in a grotto, in which father had sought shelter for the family and his stock during a blizzard, near where the town of Elliot now stands. It was two years later when a house had been completed, and my mother tells of how terribly scared I was when taken into a civilized habitation, in fact it took some time before she had me pacified. This will prove at least that I am hardly a fit subject for biographical exploitation.

At the age of ten we were overwhelmed by a Kaffir outbreak in the Sandilie or Gaika country, many families were murdered, and we escaped only because one of the leaders of the raiders had been cured of some ailment by my good old mother some years before. We were besieged in a *laager*, or camp, composed of a few hundred refugee farmers, for nearly a year.

I next became involved in excitement when gold was discovered on the Rand, and with many thousands participated in a score or more of rushes, but always succeeded in pegging my claim just a foot beyond, or short of, the gold-bearing reef. I later indulged in the stock-market on a small scale, but my rural raising and farm training fell short, the sharks got my goat as well as money, and I the experience, until I determined to try the Army.

In 1896 I took an expedition to Swaziland and had to garrison Bremersdorp, the capital, two years, before the Swazis were brought to bay. Hardly had I returned from this expedition when the Magato campaign was ordered and the orders came for me to pull out again for the front. It was during this war that I earned a compliment from General-in-Chief Piet Joubert, a thing he had never before conceded to any officer. I learned later that the reason of this departure was because when he ordered me and my men into the fight that day he was certain that I was so youthful that I would be slaughtered with all those with me, and, when we succeeded rather accidentally, the old man was ashamed of himself.

In 1896 I was elected to the Transvaal Legislature for Johannesburg, and it was during my first session as a law-maker that the late Jameson Raid, which I helped to squelch, was pulled off.

In 1899 the war with England broke out, and I took a small part. I endeavored to serve my country and people in a small way. I saw many men braver and better than myself. I had to run often, and I helped to make the enemy run many times. They accuse me of having been exchanged for Lady Sarah Wilson at Mafeking by Baden-Powell, but, like those obituaries, this is incorrect. I did not operate near Mafeking, and I hardly think Lady Sarah would stand for such an exchange, though I understand she did join friend Baden-Powell in exchange for a fellow whose name was Jan Viljoen and happened to be a captive with the besieged Mafeking contingent.

Just before the war ended it was my misfortune to fall into the enemy's hands and I was banished for life to St. Helena, where I was kept until some time after the close of the war, and eventually liberated under some sort of amnesty arrangement with the proviso that I should leave British soil, which I did. That's why I am here.

When the late President Madero started his revolt against the Diaz Government in Mexico, he invited me to join him as military adviser, and in that capacity I was able to help to a small degree in bringing about the overthrow of the autocratic Diaz régime.

Still later I served as Peace Commissioner to the Yaqui Indian tribe in Sonora, Mexico, and was there over a year though succeeded in inducing only about five hundred of them to accept civilization.

Since 1912 my health has broken down. I am suffering from chronic bronchial asthma, and I fear my race is run, and I will be able only to sit by the Camp-Fire and listen to the deeds and accomplishments of others in future.

I fear my sketch is imperfect, incomplete, and uninteresting, but when one has tried he may expect forgiveness for shortcomings. "Adue."—B. J. VILJOEN.

FROM Honduras comes this happy little tale of a fight. It makes me swell all up with pride. *That's* the kind of compliment to pay a magazine! Ten dobie dollars is quite a lot, too. Looks like a record. Can any of the rest of you beat it?

I note once in a while some one writing to say he paid a long price for *Adventure* but guess I hold the record. I paid $10 for one—dobie dollars it is true, but a dobie to us is a dollar all the same.

I found the copy, somewhat obliterated, in a native shack and made the great mistake of getting interested in a tale while they got me up a cup of coffee. They caught on—they always do—and, when I offered them a peso for the wreck, *"Oh no, señor, que libro mas excellente y un regalo tambien."* (Oh no, sir, a most excellent book and also a present.)

You know the rest. I did make a bluff of riding off in disgust but was called for $10. Heigh! Ho! Adventure? Well, I'd say so.

THEN I saw right here a bigger price still paid for one of my copies. I'm generous with them and the boys all like to be the first to get a read and seem to know by instinct when a copy has passed my hands. That time two arrived simultaneously, looking for luck, and each got here with a horrible grouch on. *Quien sabe de que!*

Anyway, there there were, sour as lemons and both wanting the same thing.

I'M SCOTCH, you know, and some of our national characteristics is to "jouk and let the jaw go bye." So I did, and put it up to them to toss a dobie to see who would get the *Adventure*. They tossed, but unfortunately they had not come to a satisfactory understanding of which emblem was head and which was tail. So they locked horns and gosh! man, you ought to have seen it! 'Twas grand.

Both were (and are) over six feet and gifted in proportion. Both hard, clean living men and, whurroo!! every lick sounded like a pile-driver. Say, man, Adventure!!!

Both lost some teeth and the poor fool Scotchman who undertook to separate them (and did) had both eyes in mourning for a week.

How's that for a price to pay? Remember, 'twas no drunken bout. Liquor don't go round me, nor can soaks assemble. Pure grouch, and desire for *Adventure*. Well, they got it and—so did I.—WM. C. ROBERTSON.

A WORD to you from our old friend and comrade Robert V. Carr. While we're sorry there are to be no more stories from him I'm sure we're all glad he has found work he likes better. And he's still one of us. Luck!

I am quite sure that there are more adventurers to the square foot around a motion-picture studio than any other place on earth. I know that the Keystone "lot" is full of them. We have ex-soldiers, ex-fighters of all kinds, and world-wanderers to no end. Mack Sennett admits of having been everything from a lumber-jack to a boiler-maker. Hampton Del Ruth, the managing editor, has had his full share of adventure. Director J. Farrell MacDonald has tasted life in the rough and knows how it feels to have his jaw broken with the barrel of a forty-five and then get his man. "Shorty" Hamilton has been a cow-puncher and a regular soldier. Tony O'Sullivan has been a world-wanderer. Yes, there are many motion-picture men qualified to "sit in" at the Camp-Fire.

I DO not mean to let go of the Camp-Fire by any means. Just because I have left the stories for the pictures does not mean that I am going to forget the friendships and relations established on the long trail. The pictures simply offer a greater chance for action. A man who has lived an up-and-down life takes to the pictures as naturally as a duck to water. There is no room in the pictures for conventional, tailor-made folks. Frankly, I like the pictures. There is "something doing" every minute. Also, the pictures pare down a man's conceit in wonderful fashion. Nice, little, hand-picked ideas, cherished by the isolated writer, prove of no value in the pictures. Action, action, action! A good picture is like a good *Adventure* story—swift movement. I know that a man whose mind deals in ornamental stuff can not break into *Adventure*, and I now know that a man who deals in ornamental stuff can not make a go of it in the pictures.

Please say "how" to the Camp-Fire bunch for me.

A BIT of an adventure; and another case of *Adventure* turning up in an out-of-the-way corner of the world:

Just received your identification card and kindly accept my thanks for same. I am going to leave *mañana* for Panama so I am going to bid you *adios*. I have been to nearly every part of the world and in nearly every way, from the rattlers to the Pullman.

Say, aren't most of your authors adventurers, for, believe muh, they certainly write adventure stories that are true to life. In fact one of the stories aroused the wanderlust in me so bad that I am going away again.

SAY, do you know what I believe is the most pleasant surprise I ever had in my life? I was near Mexico City recently and a bunch of Mexican *soldados* were making choice remarks about the gringos in general and me in particular. It didn't take me long to savvy that that wasn't the healthiest place I could be in, so I started out the nearest trail as calmly as I could.

After I had gone about a hundred yards I looked back and they were talking excitedly and pointing toward me. After one of them pulled a wicked-looking sword and started down the trail I beat it. After running about 50 miles (it seemed fully that much on that hot, dusty trail to me) I saw a *cabaña* and made for it.

IMAGINE my surprise after bursting open the door (or skin, rather) to see a genuine, dyed in the wool Texan sitting there. Living in Mexico must have sharpened his wits somewhat, for, after taking one look down the trail, he calmly picked up a Winchester and stepped outside. The Greasers halted when they saw him, but one of them said:

"Bah, nobody but a gringo. Come on and we will finish them both."

But the others evidently thought different, as they made motions toward starting back.

"He's not a Gringo, he's a Texan!" exclaimed one of them, and the others must have agreed with him, as they started back to town.

I had another pleasure awaiting me for after going back into his *cabaña* with him I discovered several back copies of *Adventure*. I stayed with him several days but had to leave when things got too hot.

I will write you again if I come through safely.—I. D. 6524.

A READER of Phœnix, Arizona, contributes to the discussion of the running powers of Indians that came up in connection with "Yahoya." Let's have some more like this. What can the human body do in the way of running?

I do not know of the Hopi Indians' running powers, as described in Camp-Fire notes on the story of Mr. Gregory's in the August issue, but I do know the Maya Indians and recall in particular two brothers who traveled 60 miles to work, returning over those same 60 miles at the close of the second day's work, laying off one day, then showing up again for a full day's labor on the fourth day, and so throughout several months. I also believe your cutting in two of distance made per day, from 80 to 40 miles, classed the accomplishment of Mr. Gregory's runner somewhat with the ordinary, as regards Indians, for I have seen—and only by dint of extreme effort, with no pack, kept up with—Indians crossing the divide in which both the Magdalena and the Caqueta (a tributary to the Amazon) have their source, who made 40 and 45 miles a day, each *hombre* carrying a pack of 100 pounds! Sounds wild, but they do it.

LETTER FRIENDS

(45) James Augustin, 3619 Magazine St., New Orleans.
(46) Milton H. Moore, Stephenville, Tex., wishes to correspond with boy of 16 to 18 in Alaska or Northern Canada.
(47) Clark L. Stevens, Colebrook, N. H.
(48) Marshall R. Hall, 1219 7th Ave., New Brighton, Pa.
(49) R. D. Lukens, Box 704, Nelson, B. C., one-time nomad, now rancher, to hear from free-lancers anywhere.
(50) Louis Wagner, 317 Gaskill St., Philadelphia, a wanderer, wishes to correspond with wanderers.

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

IF YOU have not already heard about the High-School Volunteers of the United States, by all means look them up at once. *Everybody's Magazine* has organized and is backing a national movement that is taking hold hard and fast and that will be an important factor in shaping the future of our country. It means a nationalization of the "Steever Plan" whose value the State of Wyoming first demonstrated, a plan that not only trains our boys to be defenders of their country but teaches them discipline, self-control, obedience, cleanliness and patriotism and helps give them strong, healthy bodies.

It's a good work. Help it along. Urge it on your local and State school authorities. Join in the work yourself. Do whatever you can to make the bronze button of the H. S. V. U. S. appear in the coat-lapel of every high-school boy in America. That button stands for the making of good citizens as well as good soldiers.

BACK ISSUES OF *ADVENTURE*

Note—A department for our readers' convenience. Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that back *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Practically the only way to get special back copies or to fill out your files is to watch this department for offers made by the few readers who are willing to sell or pass on stray copies or more or less complete files. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Vol. 1, No. 1 to Vol. 12, No. 6, inclusive, 72 numbers, complete, $8, carriage collect.—FRANK L. HARRIS, Camden, Me.

All issues, 1911 to date, 5 cents each.—FRED E. WILKINS, Danvers, Mass.

A VERY interesting contribution is added to the accounts furnished by members of the Camp-Fire of lost or buried treasures not included among the hundreds described by Stephen Allen Reynolds in his series of articles. These are given by Wolcott LeClear Beard, with whose stories in *Adventure* and elsewhere you are familiar.

I am impelled to write you a word of appreciation of the Lost Treasure series, completed last Winter, in which, in common with all your other readers, I fancy, I was keenly interested. I was also impressed with the infinity of research which must have been the price paid by Mr. Reynolds for his material.

This being so, the fact that he may have overlooked a bet is in no way remarkable; rather is it remarkable that he has overlooked so few. It may also be that while I was away where neither *Adventure* nor any other magazine was to be had, I may have missed one of his articles. Still, so far as I know, he makes no mention of what may be one of the world's greatest treasures.

I REFER to Atahualpa's chain. Most of us have read Prescott's account of the last great Inca (that there are Incas still is a fact not generally known, but is, as Kipling used to say, another story) and of the circumstances under which Atahualpa, the Inca in question, died. Taken prisoner by Pizarro and held for what is said to be the greatest ransom ever demanded, Pizarro, while this ransom was being collected, got an attack of what now would be called "cold feet," and had Atahualpa treacherously murdered.

When they heard of this murder those who were bringing the ransom hastily concealed the gold they were bringing, in order that it might not fall into the hands of the Spaniards. Most of it was thrown into Lake Titicaca, but much was hidden elsewhere. While I was in South America one lot, amounting, it was said, to about $540,000, was found. I believe that the find was somewhere near La Paz, and at the time I was leading an exploring expedition in the far interior of Bolivia. The questions I asked when I returned were met by an impenetrable reticence. Moreover, I was given to understand that I would be more popular with the powers that were, if I ceased to ask them; which, as it was quite useless, I did.

THE chain, however, is another matter. As the story was told me by not one, but many, it was designed to stretch, on ceremonial occasions, entirely around the Inca capital of Cuzco, and its links were made of bars "thrice the thickness of a man's thumb." This would bring its value—for it must have been about three-fourths of a mile in length—well up into the millions.

The chain now is said to repose in only about four feet of water in the bottom of a sort of well, communicating by a subterranean passage with Lake Titicaca, situated on one of the small islands near the larger island of Copacabane, where it was thrown when the news of Atahualpa's death reached its bearers.

THIS is not a secret. Many times I have heard it discussed openly and casually. But it lies on or very near the border dividing Peru and Bolivia. Neither Government dares sanction an attempt to raise it, as it is an object of veneration among the natives and such an attempt might result, it is feared, in an *indiada*—that is, a universal rising of the myriad Quichua and Aymará Indians, which never yet has occurred but of which all people of European descent live in constant dread.

I do not, of course, vouch for the truth of the foregoing. I simply "tell the tale as 'twas told to me." But, so far from being at all improbable, it bears strong internal evidence of a degree, at least, of truth.

MR. REYNOLDS hardly could be said to have overlooked anything in the Philippines; yet those islands, and especially Luzon, probably contain more buried treasure than any spot of equal area in the world. But it is scattered in comparatively small lots, as it was buried by its former owners in the time of stress and Aguinaldo.

Just before I took over charge of the province of Pangasinán as its supervisor, an individual named Prado was hung in Dagupan for three or four out of fifty or more murders that he was known to have committed. He was a chief of *tulisanes*, or, in other words, a thief on a very large scale. While awaiting execution he, it is said, offered to reveal the hiding-places of his treasure to the sergeant of his guard if the latter would connive at his escape, which proposition was declined. But a dying native, who was one of two, and the only survivor of those who had buried the treasure, did reveal the location to my master mechanic, a white man married to a *mestiza*—all of which, please note, is quite in accordance with the established methods of fiction in such cases.

MY MASTER mechanic told me. We could not recover the treasure for reasons not necessary to go into, and for aught I know it may still be where Prado placed it. It was said to amount to about $40,000 Mex. For the benefit of any who wish to have a try, I hereby reveal the secret.

The silver was buried in two parcels. One of them was almost within arm's reach of the gallows upon which Prado was hanged—that is, underneath what afterward was the bandstand, built in front of the convent in Dagupan when the troops occupied this convent as barracks. The other parcel is under a circular, turfed mound, about twenty-five feet in diamater, before the building that was used, during the military occupation of Dagupan, as Q. M. and C. S. stores, and near its center.

ONE buried treasure episode took place in the compound of my own house in Lingayén. One of my servants, and a very good man despite the fact that he was a "trusty" prisoner serving a nineteen-year sentence for murder, was in the habit of sleeping outside my bedroom door, armed with an old gas-pipe Remington, 50-caliber rifle. One night the rifle spoke, and running out we met Soltiro—the "trusty's" name was Soltiro—returning to his post with a satisfied smile on his face and the smoking rifle in his hand. Asked what had happened he said that there had been a man outside who didn't "desire to speak"—that is, who wouldn't answer when challenged—so he, Soltiro, had shot him.

"Was he a white man, Soltiro?" we asked him.

"Oh, dear, no!" he replied. "Only a Filipino, like myself."

Then he returned to his *petate* and once more composed himself to slumber.

SOLTIRO had not shot the man, however. The range being at least seven yards, he naturally had missed him. The next morning we found that this unknown person, whom Soltiro suspected of having designs upon my chickens, had really come on quite another errand. In a hole he had dug was the impression of a pot that must have held two quarts or thereabout of what undoubtedly was a cache of silver Mexican dollars.

FOR the benefit of any who may wish to raise Prado's treasures, it may be as well to state that in all probability these Philippine caches have been lifted by my ex-master mechanic long since.

AS TO Atahualpa's chain—assuming, of course, that the stories of its location are true, and even assuming that it might be reached, which it could not—it lies, as I said, in Lake Titicaca, which is on the Interandean Plateau, 12,000 feet above the sea and hundreds of miles from salt water. In that vicinity the country is rather thickly populated, and the presence of a strange white man would instantly become known. It would be hardly more possible to remove any considerable portion of the chain by stealth than it would be to do the like by the Woolworth Building; and to remove it in any other manner one would have to fight not only either or both the Bolivian and Peruvian Governments but—what is infinitely worse—the countless hordes of Indians that would rise to protect this venerated relic.

Had it been possible to get away with this treasure, there are no end of men, many of them desperate and intelligent, who would have done so. But so far as I know, no attempt, even, ever has been made.

STILL a new lost treasure is added to our list, this time by our old friend, D. Wiggins, of Salem, Ore.

Salem, Ore., Oct. 13, 1915.

About 1725, as near as we can determine. a buccaneer came ashore on the Oregon coast, at the foot of Neah-Ka-Neah Mountain (call it "Neecarney"), about 15 miles north of Tallamook. The bottom of their vessel was badly damaged in the landing, so the Indians said. She was a ship-rigged vessel and was heavily armed for those days. We know that, as some of her guns are in existence today, also the ammunition. She had about 400 in her crew.

WELL, after determining that the ship was ruined, the pirates, as they must have been, went inland some distance and dug a big hole in the bottom of a cañon. Then they put in 12 chests, each being big enough to require the services of four men to carry it up. Then they filled it.

All but one they filled with white or yellow coins, and the twelfth one they put something in that "looked as if the sun shone out of it." Which we take to have been jewels. Then the four hundred men worked for eighteen months blasting and digging down the sides of the cañon till it was level.

After that the chief made curious marks on the cliffs for miles around, and then wrote on a piece of deer-skin he had a squaw whiten for him. This he carried till he died, when it was lost. The white men fought among themselves, and soon all were killed by their comrades or the Indians. But the cannon and some relics of various sorts remain.

NOW, a friend of mine who is a foreman for the Warren Co., has spent much time in Tallamook, and he talked to an old Indian who told him the story as I've told it to you. Baker saw the old cannon-balls, and says the brass cannon were lying on the beach and hills till Oregon was taken by the U. S., when they were taken to Washington, where they now are.

He saw the carvings on the rocks, still perfectly legible, and was told that a man sent the photos of them to Cornell, if I recall it rightly, and they said it was Old English writing of the Eighteenth Century, saying that a certain distance away lay great treasure. One drawing is of an old-style compass, pointing so many degrees in one certain direction.

THE Indian showed Baker the cañon where it was placed. It has fir trees growing over it two feet thick, so it's been filled a long time. But Baker thinks that an investment of $500,000 would get the goods. It would be necessary to drift up the old floor of the cañon and then work around, as we don't know how deep it is in the original floor before it was filled. But I think it's there, all right.

Cap. Smith of Tallamook has searched for it for about forty years at every chance he has had. He has sunk lots of shafts, but hasn't enough money to do the job right. But he goes ahead whenever he gets a little stake together.

AS TO the origin of the treasure it's hard to say. The loot of a large city would suggest itself, but I don't know of any in the Pacific at that time. Of course Morgan was dead long before, but the plate fleets still sailed, and the East Indiamen were rich picking then. But if some adventurer wants to get after it I'll get him all information I can. Just let him remember me when he finds it.

A SECOND letter from Mr. Wiggins adds:

THE man who told me the story of the treasure is near here, and I can reach him in short order if necessary. I believe the story to be true, as it appears in the book, "The Bridge of the Gods," a story of early Oregon, and the collapse of the great natural bridge that once spanned the Columbia where it broke through the Cascades.

No man living has seen that wonder, but Lewis and Clark talked with Indians who had beheld it in all its glory, and today the trunks of the giant firs that decorated it are visible under the water. It was destroyed, the Siwashes say, by the battle that raged between the gods living in the interiors of Hood and Rainier. Volcanic eruption, at a guess, and taking place about 1760.

If anyone is curious about the treasure, I'll put them in communication with Baker and they can thresh the matter out for themselves.—D. WIGGINS.

AT A recent Camp-Fire, M. S. Wightman, introducing himself to us along with a story in that issue, said he had not found the West so wild and woolly as it is often painted. A Westerner replies to him:

Portland, Oregon.

You have never heard from me before because I have been a-wandering. This letter I am writing is only to correct a mistake Mr. M. S. Wightman wrote a few months ago. I have chased all over this globe at various occupations from sailor to miner, from ranger in Texas, to the Northwest Mounted. Mr. Wightman throws a very dull light on our Western country. I would like people who have never seen it to know it in its proper colors. I've known it for thirty-odd years, being born in it—in the Bear Paws of Montana in the early 80's.

WHAT would Mr. Wightman do if he was to step into a town all garnished in chapps and sombreros and gay-colored shirts and dresses, high-heeled boots and six-guns—a place that would make a moving-picture studio sit up hours to get the effect? In real truth, the old West has died a little, but the outlaw and buckaroo and cow-girl are still here. Just yesterday one of the best pistol-shots and crack riders was shot to death for robbing a bank. There are hold-ups and shooting-scraps every day. What of Hooper and Hooker? The whole Northwest knows of them. There are lots of things that happen deep into cow-land that no newspaper ever gets.

THE world's greatest riders are from the West, though of course you'll never find them sitting around a sheep-ranch. There are certain places in the West where even an outlaw is afraid to go. I have helped to catch rustlers, bank- and train-robbers. I have chased after a man clear to Fair-banks, Alaska. Another one as far South as Rio; another to Venezuela.

Now, Mr. Wightman, don't get angry, for I am only trying to right things. Our one greatest pleasure park, Yellowstone, is a favorite place for holding up stages. Every year it happens and the soldiers that patrol never get any one. Funny, isn't it? If a man wants to see the real West he must take off his white collar and get straddle of a cayuse and drift out beyond the paved streets and railroads, out where a man is a man. Not by money, or talk, or looks, but by his virtues and strength, and his law hangs on his hip. In God's own great outdoors, under turquoise skies and snow-capped mountains, that's a man's land.—WM. G. SONTAG.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U. S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five-cent postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above, except amount of postage.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

National School Camp Ass'n; address its Sec'y, 1 Broadway, New York.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, East Dorset, Vt.

Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo Mac Fergus, care *Adventure*.

Tropical Tramps Regiment, G. G. Lansing, 172 Ridgewood Ave., Ridgewood, N. J.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

I WOULD be pleased to hear from any of your readers who would like to take a trip into Lower California, placer-gold mining and hunting. For mutual protection the party should number at least four. Expenses would be comparatively small for a few months' trip; horses, camping equipment, grub and ammunition, etc. Expenses and profits (if any) to be equally divided. Campo would be a good point to start from.

Numerous reports have reached me as to the mineral, timber and agricultural wealth of Lower California, Mexico; also that hunting there was excellent, deer and smaller game being plentiful. Can any of the readers of *Adventure* advise me as to the actual conditions obtaining there. Are the above reports correct or exaggerated?—Address W. H. L., Room 68, Abbotsford Inn, Los Angeles, Calif.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER wanted. Must be an experienced trapper and hunter. One interested in fur farming preferred. If you love liquor save your stamps.—Address W. 338, care *Adventure.*

TEN men to work leased mine in Nevada; share equally. Shack and tools on property. Prospects excellent. For particulars write.—Address J. B. CONNELL, care *Adventure.*

COMPANION wanted, woman. One who loves to travel. Must pay her own expenses. References exchanged.—Address MISS B. MARCUS, 1796 St. Lawrence Blvd., Montreal, Can.

MAN wanted to assist in investigating the conditions of our State Insane Hospitals; the work will be interesting and adventurous, especially as these places have never been investigated from a scientific standpoint. Heretofore the investigations, if any, were carried on by newspapers either for political or pecuniary reasons. Reporter, detective or Doctor of Psychiatry preferred. For further information write.—Address FRANK M. BEERS, Box X, Northampton, Mass.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

TWO young men about 19 or 23 years to rough it with me in my quest for a treasure that I have charts for. Must be good shots and fearless. Must stand own expenses. Share alike. Want to start before Winter, so answer immediately.—Address R. L. SWAIN, 1938 Franklin Ave., Toledo, Ohio.

YOUNG man to accompany my wife and me on auto trip from California to Boston. I will pay all expenses except his board and lodging. Prefer some one who can take his turn at driving. All answers strictly confidential.—Address W. 340, care *Adventure.*

LOST TRAILS

Note.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

TRAVERS, STANLEY; left for Detroit *via* Chicago to work timber in the woods near Tawass Bay. I was with him in Memphis, Tenn. in Jan. 1916 and again in Vera Cruz in Feb. In March I met him in New Orleans, where he worked his way on a sailing ship. Afterward he got a job as some sort of inspector for the British Government and was still working when I left for St. Louis on the river-boat *Homer Smith* for Cincinnati, Ohio. His people in England are also looking for him. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write. 20 years, 5 ft., 150 lbs.—Address Jack Emerson, General Delivery, Detroit, Mich.

BILLMAN, JOHN (Jack); left home May 1908. R. R. engineer on L. S. & M. S. Elkhart Div. Wife died in Fall 1908. Good looking. Black hair, green eyes, 220 lbs., 44 years, 6 ft., and very crooked teeth. Was reported to have been seen in Chicago about three years ago. Daughter would like to hear from him or any one who has any information of his whereabouts.—Address L. T. 335, care *Adventure.*

McGORRAY, LAWRENCE; last heard of somewhere near Marysville, Calif. in or about '94. Was born in Rochester, N. Y. 5 ft., 50 years. Was shipmates in ship *Willie Reed,* N. Y. to 'Frisco '81-2. Came home in ship *Sea King.* Was in Bangor, Me. in Spring of '89. Please communicate with old friends.—Address Llewellyn M. Ames, 339 Essex St., Bangor, Me.

JOHNSON, W. H., last heard of in Mexico in 1913 with the C. I. Pack. Was with C. I. Pack in Alaska in 1910 known as "Iron Nerve" Johnson. There were three Johnsons in the Mexico trip, two with the same name, but he was known as "Lion Heart." Why, I do not know except there was nothing he wouldn't be afraid to undertake. —Address F. M. Johnson, Gen. Del., Raleigh, N. C.

COOPER, B. F.; last seen on the night of April 30, 1915 in Mobile, Ala. Supposed to be somewhere in the West. Dark brown hair, fair skin, blue eyes, wears hat size 7⅛, shoes No. 9, 190 lbs., age 30. A machinist by trade. Your boy B. F. is big enough to call dada and needs you bad. Mother is sick and wants to see her wandering boy. Any information regarding his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated.—Address W. D. Cooper, R. F. D. No. 1, Spring Hill, Mobile, Ala.

MAHONEY, ED.; *alias* "New Orleans Eddie" who was with me in Texas, New Orleans and Mobile and also was working with me for a farmer in Miss. in the years 1913-14. His old-time partner the Jersey Kid or Snookums would like to hear from him.—Address Charlie Fredericks, 452 Elizabeth Ave., Elizabeth, N. J.

SHARP, JESSE R.; last heard from about ten years ago. Was in New Zealand and said he would start for the States in about three months. Have written but letters were returned. Married, 38 years, 175 lbs., blue eyes, dark hair, 5 ft.—Address M. L. Sharp, Box 354, Chiney, Spokane C. O., Wash.

SHAW, WILLIAM F.; left home about June 19-20, 1916. Perhaps joined troops bound for Mexico, or circus. If Bill or any of his friends see this, write to me in confidence so I will know he is all right and will not hunt further for him.—Address Jack A. Shaw, U. S. Coast Guard Sta., Narragansett Pier, R. I.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CLIFF, HARRY J.; last heard of in Dawson, New Mexico, in September 1915. Was going to a position as timekeeper in one of the mines. 5 ft., rather slight build, dark and is English. Any one having information please write to a friend of his.—Address Arthur S. Ford, care Aluminum Cooking Utensil Co., Portland, Ore.

OLSEN, EDWARD T.; last heard from in Cape Town, South Africa, where the English Army disbanded. Left New Orleans, La. during Sept. 1900 and served from Nov. 8, 1900 to Nov. 12th, 1901, in Company F, Nesbit's Horse, English Army. Last address was Cape Colony, South Africa, Woodstock Post-Office. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his brother.—Address Ollof Olsen, 414 State St., New Orleans, La.

WILDT, JOHN, last heard of at Utica, N. Y. Left his home at Albany, N. Y. Sept. 1915. Brown hair, blue eyes, tall, muscular, 24 years, 160 lbs. and is left-handed. His mother, father and brother all anxious to hear from him. I have a good thing here in Calif. Write at once.—Address Ed. Wildt, Jerseydale, Calif.

McLAUGHLIN, MOSES HUNT; last heard from in Utica, N. Y. His daughter, Grace Louise, is very anxious to hear from him. There's only two left in the family, my brother and myself.—Address Grace Louise McLaughlin, 59 East 67th St. So., Portland, Ore.

FERNALD, L. W.; who went in the Yaqui River country in 1914. Also W. 227 who went or was going into Penn. to do some placer-mining in the same year. Would like to know their whereabouts.—Address L. T. 339, care *Adventure.*

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

LLOYD, RALPH; was in the Latin Americas with Leo Masterten in '12-'13. Is again missing following his departure from St. Louis on Nov. 30, 1915. Supposed to have returned to Belize or Yucatan. If Leo Masterten knows his whereabouts, advise us at once. Important.—Address Mr. & Mrs. J. J. Pollitt, care *Adventure.*

CARTWRIGHT, JOHN; last heard of in Ark. about 1874. One wrist stiff from an injury received. Do not know which one. Any information will be greatly appreciated. His nephew inquires.—Address Harley J. Campbell, Northampton, Mass. N. S. H. Box P.

FROMME, HARRY E.; 20th Inf., U. S. A., "E" Co. Write to your old Salt Lake City pal. I have important news.—Address Owen C. Trainor, Los Angeles Co. Road Dept., Huntington Park, Calif.

DECKER, E. L.; Sergt. U. S. M. C. in Culebra Porto Rico. Latter part of '05 and '06 in Co. "A" floating Battalion U. S. S. *Dixie.* Oct. '06 at Santo Domingo. Capt. L. Lyons, U. S. M. C. commanding.—Address J. H. Holman, Victoria, Va.

RICHARD, ARTHUR; last heard of was in Butte, Mont. about 1902. Was in the gold-fields in Nevada. His nephew would like to hear from him.—Address Arthur Campeau, care J. P. Campeau, Dillon, Mont.

DOVEN, JOHN; late of Battery E, 4th U. S. Artillery. Would like to hear from members of Battery who were stationed at Fortress Monroe from Sept. 1898 to Feb. 1899. —Address J. Doven, 1128 Schwabe St., Freeland, Pa.

CARPENTER, WILLIAM CHARLES; last heard of in May, 1915, residing at that time in Fresno. Any information as to his whereabouts will be gratefully received by his son.—Address C. Frederick Carpenter, care *Adventure.*

FRAIN, JAMES; last heard of in St. Louis in 1875. Was a deaf mute. 65 years. Any information would be appreciated.—Address L. T. 337, care *Adventure.*

MONAHAN, CHAS.; "Top" Sergt. Last heard from in Decatur, Ill. Soldiered with him in the Philippines from 1800 to 1901 in Co. B, 34th Vol. Inf. Would like to get in touch with him.—Address E. PAQUETTE, R. No. 1, Box 108, W. Riverside, Calif.

TANNEBAUM, LESLIE; left Wheeling, W. Va. Apr. 10, 1916. Light hair, very heavy nose glasses, 5 ft., age 23.—Address MRS. LESLIE TANNEBAUM, 73 Glenwood Court, Akron, Ohio.

AVELING, of London. Was in Klondike in '98. Would like to hear from him.—Address STEVE HAMMOND, care Union Printing Co., Spokane, Wash.

JETTE, HERBERT; last seen in Portland, Ore. on Aug. 11, 1915. Dark brown curly hair, sallow complexion, 160 lbs., blue eyes, 5 ft., and 17 years.—Address MRS. ELIZABETH JETTE, Clatsop Co., Seaside, Ore.

QUINN, ARTHUR; left New York City Feb. 19, 1916 on prospecting trip in northwestern part of U. S. Last heard from in Trail, British Columbia. Write home at once. Important.—Address AUSTIN YERKS, 157 West 103rd St., New York City.

STEWART, FRED S., ex-gunner's mate of the *Georgia* on the 'round the world cruise and later assistant chief of C. M. and St. P. Setedwes, Miles City, Mont.—Address R. D. LUKENS, Box 704, Nelson, B. C.

WILSON, D. L.; last seen in Savin Rock, Conn. Sept. 1914. Would like to know whereabouts.—Address A. F. NOBLE, Co. K, 1st Inf., U. S. A., N. G. of Pa., El Paso, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MILLER, MARCELLUS DELL; last heard of in Oakland, Calif. about 1905. Left Chicago for West about 1898. Information will be gratefully received by his son.—Address R. D. MILLER, care Holt M'n'f'g Co., Spokane, Wash.

SCHMIDT, LOUISA and Charles, my brother and half-sister. Last heard from in Honolulu, H. I., 1899.—Address JOSEPH W. SMITH, 33 East 22nd St., Whitestone, L. I.

OVESTRY, reward for information of present whereabouts. 6 ft.; curly hair; medium complexion; stutters slightly; smooth shaven. To his advantage. L. T. 336, care *Adventure.*

MULLIGAN, MARTIN; last heard of in New York City tending bar. Left Phila. between 1900 and 1902. His four sons would like to see him.—Address M. J. M., care *Adventure.*

SPEARS, R. S.; last heard from at Imperial, Col. in 1903. With me in Ft. Worth in 1909. Write to me.—Address M. M. COLEMAN, Ranger Lake, N. M.

THE following have been inquired for in full in the October and November issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BRINTON, ARTHUR H.; Burnham, Frank; Cecetka, A. F. (violinist); DeLaCour, Joseph W.; Dodson, Lucien (L. H.); Drinkwater, Everett E.; Duncan, Jasper N., Salt Lake City or Anaconda; Gilbert, "Pink Pill"; Gourley, John H.; Hawley, or Holley, Mrs. Grace; Houston, W. T. D. (pronounced Euston); Huber, Henry M.; Hulings, Frank; Hunt, Arthur; McCann, Elman C. J.; McWorth, W. D. (Billy Mac); MacKenzie, Thomas (telegraph dispatcher); Martin, W. J.; Marz, last heard of in Frisco; Peralto, Jose L., New Orleans 1914; Richardson, Frank Eply; Slider, Ada; Spanoro, Corporal A. T.; Stringfellow, Jessamine; Taylor, Charles G.; Ton, W. R., San Francisco at "Kenilworth"; Van Pelt, Ellis Loy; Woonton, Charles.

MISCELLANEOUS: Any one knowing the whereabouts of the LaBlache (white) family that was settled in Southern States around Tenn. and Ark. during Civil War. Or family of John Ambeau will learn something of interest if they communicate at once.

LAWRENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Gaynor Maddox, Mrs. Maude Thomas, Hastlar Gal Breath, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293, W 311, W 312. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to the new serial by H. Rider Haggard, mentioned in our ad on page 2, the following strong features are scheduled for the January issue of *Adventure*, out December 3d:

THE MAN FACTORY

A Complete Novel by *Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton*

A gripping tale of the Northland. Told by the Pinkertons, who live there.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

A Complete Novelette by *Arthur D. Howden Smith*

Our old friend Captain McConaughy leads his crew of psalm-singing, fighting sailors against the Senussi, to liberate the Primitive Christians on the coast of Asia Minor.

THE CHASE OF THE FOUR FOOLS

by *Patrick and Terence Casey*

In which the Green, Green God finds its final resting place, and you come to the end of this amazing adventure of white men in the heart of unexplored Borneo.

THE BROTHERS

James Francis Dwyer

A hunt for gold far out on the Great American Desert, and the supreme test of two men when seized by desert madness.

A HERO—UNDER PRESSURE

William Dudley Pelley

Will Vermont's native sons come back to the old Green Mountain State? This story takes a throat-hold on the question. It will make you think—and think hard.

THE CURSE OF GOLD

W. C. Tuttle

Just one good laugh after another. The West, a hold-up, and a big surprise,

IN THE SAWDUST COUNTRY

Harrison R. Howard

This country is the lumbering section of California, where a man's two fists are very useful.

THE BIG FLASH

James B. Hendryx

A mountaineer from the South carries his feud to New York City with startling results.

THE NIGHT RIDER

W. A. Macdonald

What happened when a railroad hired the cleverest man-hunter in America to stop hold-ups on their trains.

STUBBORN STEVE

Brevard Mays Connor

He kicked because his wife used rouge—kicked so hard he landed in Old Mexico, slam up against a gang of Greasers who lived "off the country." Then things happened.

THE KILLER, THE KID, AND THE BAD MAN

Nevil G. Henshaw

The killer hid in Louisiana swamps, the kid didn't care for him, and the bad man was fresh from a Wild West show. The three stage an act that's a whirlwind.

THE WILL TO DIE

Edwin C. Dickenson

A tale of the sea that will bring the boom of canvas to those of you who love salt spray but must stay at home.

ON THE WAY BACK

Roy P. Churchill

Two-fist Holt proves there's a heap of good in the heart of the toughest jackie that ever landed in the Naval Hospital after a night ashore.

JANUARY ADVENTURE

A Really Practical Christmas Gift

GLADDENING THEIR WHOLE YEAR!

YOUR father, your brother, your uncle, all your friends—men or women—can wish no keener enjoyment than reading the fascinating, unsurpassed stories of ***Adventure*** during the coming 12 months.

Can you imagine how good a present a year's subscription to ***Adventure*** will make, coming once each month during 1917, a vigorous, stimulating issue, teeming with humorous and forceful and manly stories by such excellent writers as Sir H. Rider Haggard, Beatrice Grimshaw and Talbot Mundy—the kind you have loved to read in past ***Adventure*** issues? And *all the while* that these stories are bringing entertainment and pleasure, your friend or your relative knows it is *your* mindfulness, *your* forethought that has brought this practical gift.

Cut out the coupon below. Make out a list of the names and addresses of your friends to whom you would like to send ***Adventure***—enclose with your remittance and mail at once.

AND IN ADDITION—we will send this clean-cut neat Christmas Card, to each recipient, bearing your name.

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May we add our pleasure in sending Adventure, and our belief that it will bring to you many enjoyable hours of reading and entertainment.

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To give your friends 12 months of pleasure

What Is It Makes Men Fight?

IN one short ugly sentence she had stripped him of his manhood. In a moment of jest, she had cut deep into his heart. As he lay gazing at the blinking stars and the shells that shrieked and burst, there again rang in his ear that mocking laugh which had sent him flying to the front. She had the prettiest hair, the brightest eyes, the most tantalizing smile in all San Augustine. He would SHOW the world that a lion's heart beat in his little body.

The war closed and he went home—a Colonel and a hero. San Augustine was frenzied over its native son. Straight up the path to her home, he walked—and then—the thing that happened wasn't at all what you think.

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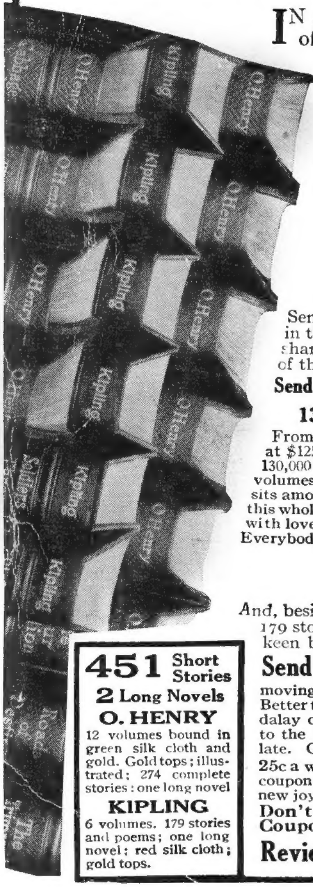

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